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NO. 125 / APRIL 2001

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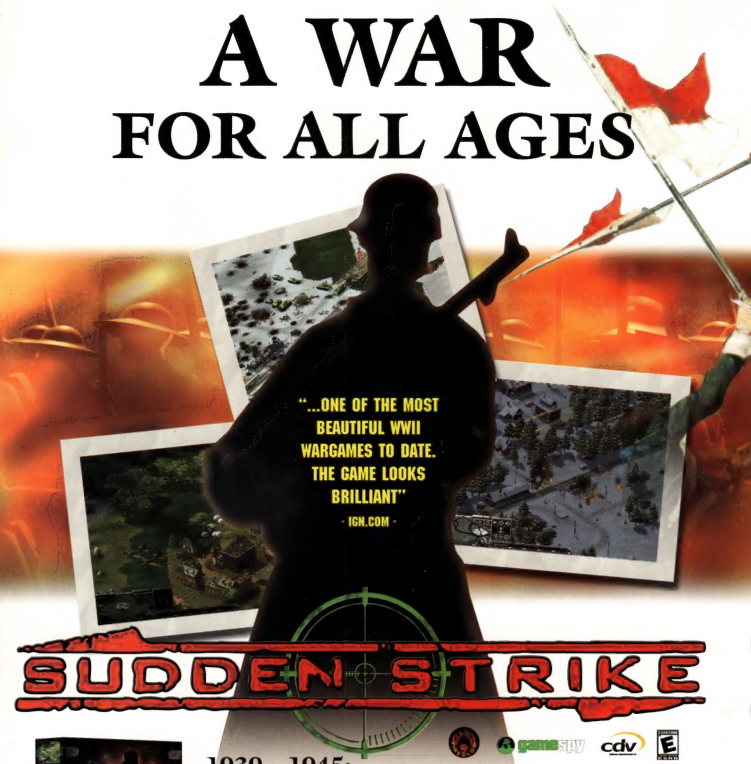

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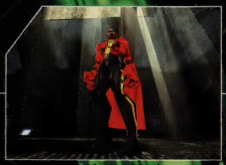

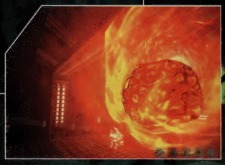

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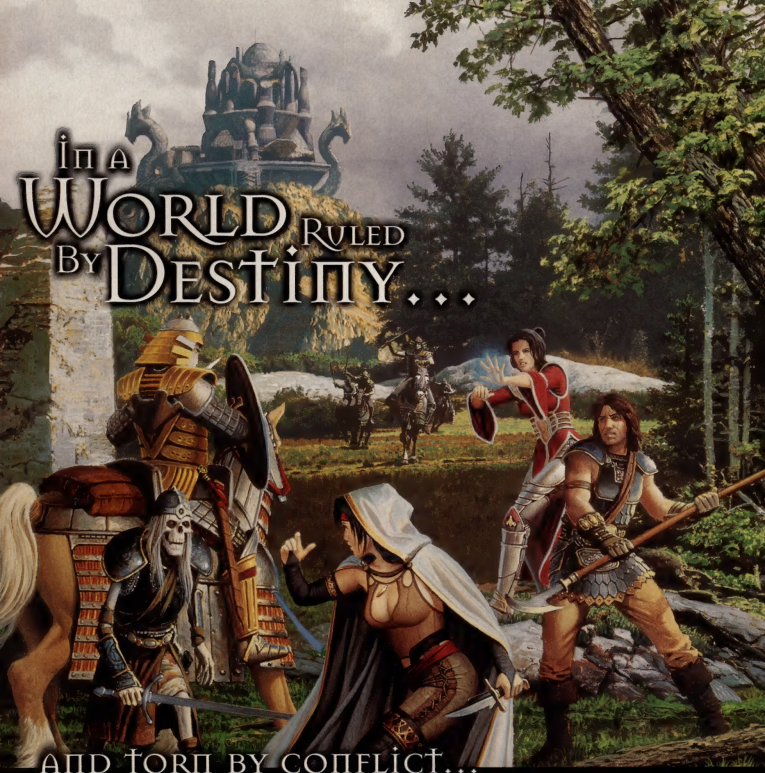

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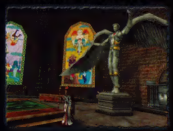

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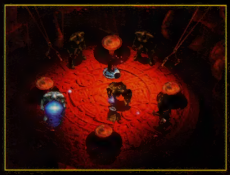

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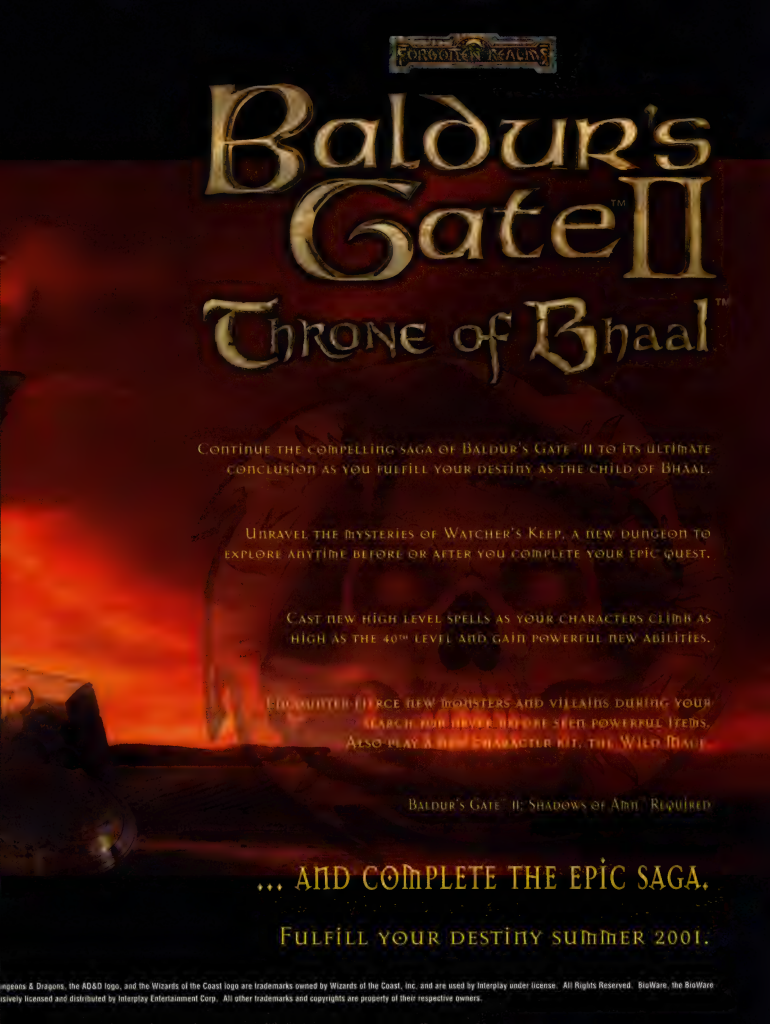
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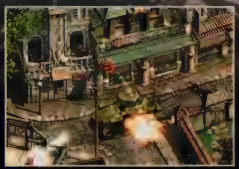

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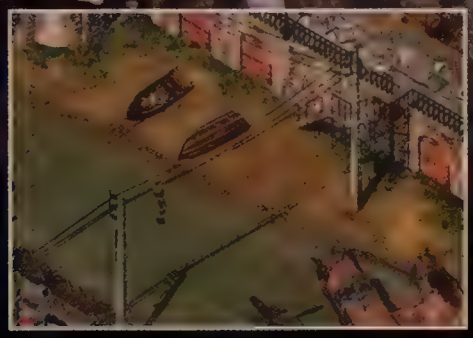

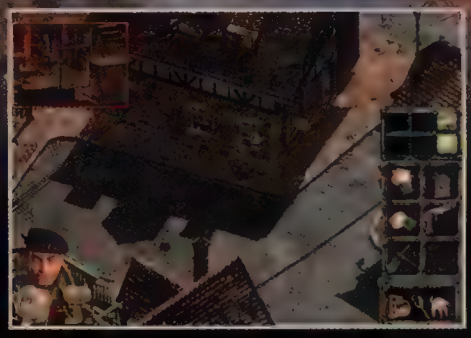

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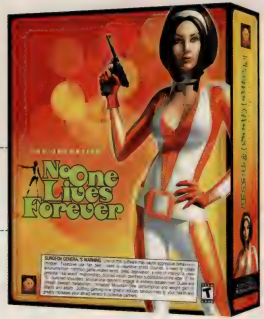

The "I can't think of a topic" fallback column

by Steve Bauman

Welcome to our annual awards issues. You may be asking yourself, "Self, why are they doing this in the April issue? Wouldn't it make more sense in the January issue, or even February?" Of course it would—unfortunately the crazy and wacky nature of the magazine business makes this impossible. Common sense dictates that we would visit yearly awards at the end of the year. However, at the end of the year, we're not working on an end of the year issue. In fact, in December we're working on the March issue, which appears on newsstands in February, the reason for which I have never received a proper explanation. Confused yet?

That's okay; these are confusing times to be involved with games. For example, at press time, the United States Supreme Court accepted for review a rather simple question: May the government criminalize computer-generated images of fictitious people engaged in imaginary acts? This case stems from a successful challenge of the Child Pornography Protection Act of 1996. That act deemed certain materials to be child pornography if they depict a person who "appears to be" or "conveys the impression" of being a minor. While three Federal appeals courts have upheld the new child porn law, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals of San Francisco deemed the act unconstitutional because the phrases "appears to be" and "conveys the impression" are vague.

If the Supreme Court were to overturn this verdict, there would be potential ramifications in the virtual world, particularly in online games. If Congress can lawfully make synthetic pictures illegal on the basis that they are dangerous to society, how will that apply to acts committed in virtual game worlds? We've already seen accusations of "virtual rape" in massively multiplayer games and MUDs, and clearly there's plenty of player-on-player violence. Can such a law imply that people are legally accountable in the real world for their actions in a virtual one—even in the context of a game? Much of the justification for banning virtual child pornography is that it whets the appetite of pedophiles, which might translate into victimization of actual children. Could that argument not be used in the case of virtual murder—that it might inspire someone with murderous impulses to actually act on them? Scary stuff, kids... scary stuff.

In other news, the demonization of videogames continues unabated, as Surgeon General David Satcher issued a report tying violent TV shows and videogames to more aggressive behavior in children. "Exposure to violent media plays an important causal role in this societal problem [of violence among children]," the report states. "From a public-health perspective, today's [media] consumption patterns are far from optimal. And for many children they are clearly harmful."

Although the report does at least acknowledge other factors contributing to youth violence (home environment, school, socioeconomic background), it's likely that politicians will latch on to the overriding "media violence is bad" aspect of the report. This could lead to putting even more pressure on the media to limit the creation of, and access to (though not necessarily in that order) violent entertainment. While we've beat this topic to death over the last year, it still bears repeating that this wouldn't be an issue if retailers would do their part to enforce age restrictions at the cash register.

The only positive aspect of the Surgeon General's report is the possibility of having a Surgeon General Warning on games. Here is one possibility:

> SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Use of this software may cause aggressive behavior in children. Excessive use has been linked to repetitive stress injuries, a need to create acronyms from common game-related terms, sleep deprivation, a loss of interest in interpersonal "real world" relationships, blurred vision, pointless substitution of the letter "z" for "s", hunched shoulders, an irrational desire to engage in endless debates over *Quake* and *Unreal*, lowered metabolism, increased Mountain Dew consumption and weight gain in infants and adults. Quitting gaming now greatly reduces serious risks to your health and greatly increases your attractiveness to potential partners.

Plaster that on a game box and we're set. You have been warned.

In other news, we'd like to welcome aboard Tricia Cray and Alan Cadmus to the *Computer Games* staff. Alan came to us from IBM, where he was building chips or doing something too complex for anyone here not named Jason Cross to understand. He really likes hockey and has megalomaniacal tendencies that he works out through empire-building strategy games. He gets to write a lot of articles for our website (look for a redesign "very soon").

Tricia heads up our new West Coast division (of one) and has been kicking around the game industry for six years, starting out on a television show called Video Game Slams and moving on to testing for Sega, Sony and Eidos before entering the nefarious realm of PR and marketing for Eidos, Rockstar Games and Gamers.com. She now gets to score all of the free drinks and food at the various west coast game company parties that all editors of this publication command. Yes, we're jealous.

Finally, we received many comments from readers regarding the interest level in Xbox coverage in this magazine. You all made a lot of good points, and for the few hundred people who took the time to write in, thank you for the feedback. Rather than run a selection in this month's Rebound, we've decided to put together a full story for next month's issue. You may be pleasantly surprised, as we were, by some of the more insightful comments; you folks know what you want. As for what you want... you'll have to wait until next issue to find out. ■

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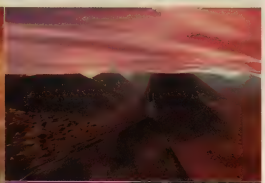


[top] Nightfall Romance.
An Everquest Wedding.

Virtually married

Check your weapon at the door; someone's getting hitched online

WITH THE CONTINUOUS EXPANSION OF THE INTERNET IN MANY INDIvidual's day-to-day life, it is not uncommon to find people that have met friends and spouses online. As the volume of personal ads and chat environments expands daily, it is no wonder that many people are utilizing cyberspace to find people. Playing computer gamers used to be a solitary activity. While curled up in front of a monitor with games like *Wizardry*, *Zork* or *Myst*, contact with other human beings was limited to the pleasantries exchanged at the cash register.

Look at the outfits!

Now with any number of online role-playing games available to choose from (*Ultima Online*, *EverQuest*, and *Asheron's Call* being the most popular), what was a normally solitary lifestyle is now filled with constant human interaction. It is inevitable that those who are dedicated to playing computer games will be thrilled to find a potential love interest engaging in the same sort of fun. It is almost like a role-player's Nirvana. Nestled comfortably within the warmth of their home and fuzzy slippers, individuals can meet, talk intimately, and unofficially marry other cybersouls without ever having to change their clothes.

But marriage is not just limited to textual environments or romantic chat worlds; binding relationships can also be found in online role-playing games. Since the introduction of *Meridan 59*, game designers have anticipated this kind of behavior; individuals meet while enjoying their favorite pastime, fall in virtual (and sometimes real) love and tie the knot, all within the pixelated environment of their game. The commitment that players demonstrate to their cyber spouses is often no different than an offline marriage. Couples go to work, come home, eat dinner, and share their day. They converse about things of interest, discuss future financial investments, and plan for their future. Then they get together with a bunch of their friends and kill a dragon.

Friends and lovers

Falling in love in a role-playing environment is not inconceivable. You are playing a character that is engaged in high-risk combat situations, often in the company of your guild or a group of friends. You have an adrenaline rush with each success and the chivalric assistance of others in times of failure. When

people log into their server, they find themselves engaged in their fantasy world for three or four hours at a time. Considering that some dates in the real world do not last that long, it is no wonder that individuals bond and fall in love with the pixelated persona who just saved them from an horde of goblins.

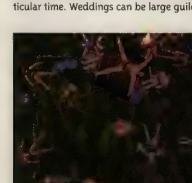
Ishaun Shade, of *EverQuest*'s Prexus server says he married his partner in the game, "because he felt that she was always there for him." His wife Katelynn Shade says she thought that her role-playing husband was more attentive to things of interest to her than most of her real world friends. In both cases, the parties felt that their online partners fulfilled their needs better than a potential real world companion. The most common statement that the men we talked to made regarding meeting their love online was that they were happy to have met someone who shared the same gaming interest and intensity that they themselves had. At least this partner understood why one would stay up until 4:00AM trying to finish a quest while a non-gamer might consider it ludicrous to endure such sleep deprivation. "Given the amount of time that I play," explains Katelynn Shade, "my *EverQuest* spouse is far more understanding than any other partner I have ever had."

Here comes the bride, all dressed in hide

Marriages within online role-playing games are usually game-sanctioned endeavors. Generally conducted in exotic or quiet locations of the bride and groom's choice, Game Masters supervise the exchange of vows and witness the celebrations. In a game like *Ultima Online*, marriages tend to be quiet affairs since the environment allows player-versus-player killing. Individuals who wish to disrupt a ceremony could, for example, raid or invade the ceremony and battle the unwilling parties. Members of *Ultima Online* have developed ingenious ways of having non-lethal marriages, such as finding locations where guards kill duelers, entering zones in small numbers as to not advertised the gathering of a large group, and more recently, utilizing a non-PvP environment for marriages, and then returning to their normal playing regions.

"Marriages are rather difficult because of rampant player-killing," says Xoom of the *Ultima Meadow* forum. "Since [the game] has become much less player-killing oriented and has left the players who are the kind of player to role-play marriages, OSI has really catered to that type of gamer."

On most official server boards within *EverQuest* you can see three or four listings for weddings at any particular time. Weddings can be large guild or public



See why weapons and weddings don't mix?

celebrations or smaller, more intimate affairs. The same appears true for *Asheron's Call*. A player killer environment, however, can definitely give new meaning to the term "shotgun wedding."

Where the boys are

One concern within online marriages is whether "what you see is what you get." According to Sony Interactive's Scott McDaniel, Executive of Marketing and Public Relations for *EverQuest*, 91% of their registrations are male; there is an estimated 11% (plus or minus three) of female participants within the game. Given that 58,000 people play during peak hours, 5800 of these are women. With the number of servers available to *EverQuest*, an average of approximately 150-200 women can be found playing on each server during peak play periods. Given this, it can become an epic quest for any male seeking female companionship since there are approximately 1500 individuals on a server during peak hours.

A paucity of potential spouses isn't the only obstacle in the path of men seeking cyber-love, however. Through informal surveys done on official and non-official boards, most women said they played female characters, but there were also many men who admitted playing females as well. This suggests that when a intrepid traveler waiting outside of Heartbreak Hotel spies an adorable Elf in extremely interesting leather armor, there is no guarantee that on the other end of the keyboard, said female character in question is governed by an equally romantically interested female. In fact, chances are that the character is more likely a six foot three, beard-sporting male. Ellendilh Silvermist of the *EverQuest* Prexus forum admits to having several female characters on his account but he got tired of men assuming that he was a female. "Though several times I got nice items for free because people did assume I was female."

Some men interviewed admitted that when playing their female persona they feel uncomfortable when other men flirt with them. Others admit they enjoyed the attention, and find that when playing female characters, they receive more gifts of armor, weapons, and interesting items than when they play male personas. Role-playing has that advantage, and when it's done online no one can see what is happening with the other person. For example, an individual may avoid mentioning their human relationships on the outside, and the excited love interest can not see the enraged spouse watching over the monitor as the participant states, "just one more kill, honey, and then I will come to bed."

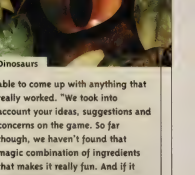
In an article for the August 2000 edition of *Time Digital* magazine, Susan Gregory Thomas examines not only how an online role-playing game affected her real world marriage, but also how the sex of the characters affected both her and her husband. Her husband played a male Erudite; she opted for a female barbarian. This came about after she found her husband talking to a female wood elf, admiring her custom made armor. Despite the fact that, statistically speaking, chances were that it was a man playing the female wood elf, she opted to join the game for as she states, "It's either the wood elf or me."

Taking it to "RL"

As often happens in cyber-relationships, people at the end of the keyboard seek to meet in real life (or "RL," as they say). They may exchange pictures and arrange meetings. Do some of these cyber-relationships survive into the real world? Yes. Have some individuals lost their spouses to other members of their guild or to an

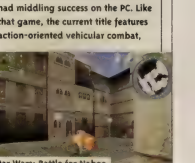
briefs

Sid Meier's Dinosaurs extinct—Sid Meier announced that "the Dinosaur game" is on indefinite hold while he and Firaxis work on other projects. In the latest, and presumably last, installment of his "Dino Diaries," Meier said that after trying a variety of different approaches, he wasn't



Dinosaurs

able to come up with anything that really worked. "We took into account your ideas, suggestions and concerns on the game. So far though, we haven't found that magic combination of ingredients that makes it really fun. And if it ain't fun, it don't get done!" Meier noted that he has created a new prototype of a completely different game, which he is pleased with, and that he hopes to pursue that project now instead of the dinosaur game... No Obi-Wan, but...—LucasArts may have canceled the PC version of *Obi-Wan*, but they do have another *Episode I* game in the works. *Star Wars: Battle for Naboo* is making its way from the land of Mario and Pikachu to the realm of Windows and Direct3D. The Nintendo 64 version of the game is already out, and the PC version promises to be pretty much identical. As LucasArts describes it, *Battle for Naboo* is "reminiscent" of 1998's *Rogue Squadron*, another N64 port that had middling success on the PC. Like that game, the current title features action-oriented vehicular combat,



Star Wars: Battle for Naboo

focusing flying machines but including an assortment of more terrestrial vehicles like speeders. The evil Trade Federation provides the enemies, in the form of various flavors of droids and droid starfighters. Look for arcade-style action, solid visuals, and about as much depth as Jar-Jar's autobiography. The game is slated to enter planetary space sometime >>>

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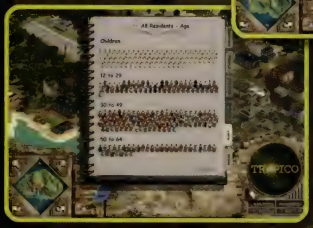

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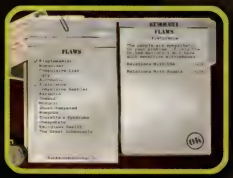

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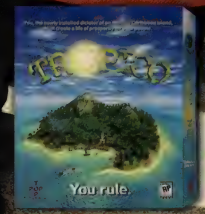


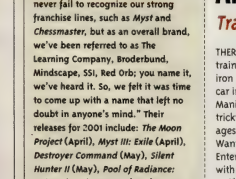
tropico.godgames.com

Mac

PC CD ROM

briefs

In March... Diablo II is really popular—Blizzard announced that *Diablo II* sold more than 2.75 million copies worldwide in 2000, based on information from PC Data and key retail accounts around the world. This makes it the fastest-selling game in Blizzard's history. An expansion set, *Diablo II: Lord of Destruction*, is scheduled for release on the PC and Macintosh in mid the middle of 2001, which when put through the official "Blizzard Release Date Translator" means we'll see it sometime in the year 2004.... Gores got GAME—The appropriately named (for a game company) Gores Technology Group, the lucky owners of The Learning Company and its various divisions, have named their game division the slightly redundant and obvious (look who's talking) GAME Studios. Explaining the move, General Manager Jeff Hoff notes that "People

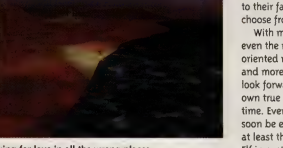


Myst III

never fail to recognize our strong franchise lines, such as *Myst* and *Chessmaster*, but as an overall brand, we've been referred to as The Learning Company, Broderbund, Mindscape, SSI, Red Orb; you name it, we've heard it. So, we felt it was time to come up with a name that left no doubt in anyone's mind." Their releases for 2001 include: *The Moon Project* (April), *Myst III: Exile* (April), *Destroyer Command* (May), *Silent Hunter II* (May), *Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor* (May), *Larry Bond's Harpoon*^{4} (July), *Flanker Attack* (July), *Solar* (September) and *Warlords IV* (September)... Electronic Arts to publish Battlefield 1942—Electronic Arts has signed an exclusive worldwide agreement with Swedish game developer Digital Illusions to publish *Battlefield 1942*. The game will include a variety of playable vehicles from famous fighters to tanks and battleships. The game will also include a vast array of battlefields allowing players to engage in skirmishes that take place in small towns or wage massive battles on land and sea. In other news, they'll be publishing a new expansion for *The Sims* called "House Party." No word on whether or not legendary rappers Kid n' Play will be involved... SomeTHING's rotten in England—You may or may not >>>

über-level warrior? According to the forums, yes. McDaniel verifies that *EverQuest* has received complaints from spouses not only regarding the addictive qualities of the game, but also the damage to real world relationships the game is allegedly responsible for. It turns out that people have actually left their real world spouses for individuals who can take out a Hill Giant without destroying the soufflé.

But while there are some sad stories, there are considerably more happy ones. There is a multitude of married couples who team together every night and share the fun of seeking new adventures. There are



Looking for love in all the wrong places.

couples who have united forces both in game and outside the game. "I've seen more online relationships since I got on the Internet than you can shake a stick at," says Bramble Burrpaw from the Meadow forum. "Technically, I think I am in one now, but in this case, it is more a question of two people who talk outside of games but still want to play them together."

While this may seem no different than two cat lovers meeting on a forum dedicated to Abyssinians, it is different because it is fictional environment that has allowed this love to blossom. It is almost like meeting your one true love in the land of Narnia.

We may never meet in real life again

With the added social element of the gaming environment, even non-gamers have admitted to enjoying the fruits of online role-playing environments. With the enthusiastic support that these games have received, online fanatics will be enjoying expansions to their favorite games as well as more games to choose from as the 21st century progresses.

With more games covering a wider interest base, even the most finicky of gamers may find an Internet oriented role-playing game of interest. And as more and more women become computer savvy, men can look forward to increased chances of finding their own true love while engaging in their favorite pastime. Even the most isolated computer gamer may soon be enjoying the fruits of another's affections. Or at least the attention of a really spiffy looking Wood Elf in custom leather armor. —*Christine Gilbert*

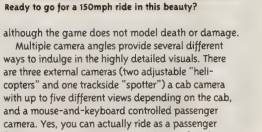
All Aboard

Train Simulator lets you ride the rails, armchair style...

THERE'S A CERTAIN CULTURAL FASCINATION WITH trains, an almost mythic reverence for these massive iron snakes that can haul over 100 tons of cargo per car in a freight run that might pull over 50 cars. Manipulating a 5,000-ton metal monster through a tricky mountain pass or a passenger train that averages over 100 mph is no mere game of stop and go. Want to give it a shot? Microsoft and UK-based Kuju Entertainment are promising to let you do just that with *Microsoft Train Simulator*.

The game will place you in the cab of one of nine locomotives (the game also features some extra, non-drivable models as ambient traffic) with authentically rendered and fully functional gauges. You'll get six stretches of detailed train routes (600 miles in all) with accurately modeled elevation and terrain from satellite maps. Activities include hauling freight, picking up and dropping off cars, transporting Amtrak passengers between stations, and just sitting back and enjoying the view of Mt. Fuji from the Odakyu series 7000.

Like its simulation series cousin, *Train Simulator* attempts to model the physical world environment as accurately as possible. Weather effects such as rain, snow, and fog can impair visibility and make it difficult to read upcoming signals, or require you to sand the tracks to prevent wheel slip or help with braking. Crossings are modeled with traffic appropriate to each era, as well as other traffic on the line. Armchair engineers will not be disappointed: grade, individual car weight, coupling and car slack management—it's all here. And yes, for the destruction derby types masquerading as sim purists, you *can* crash or derail,



Ready to go for a 150mph ride in this beauty?

although the game does not model death or damage.

Multiple camera angles provide several different ways to indulge in the highly detailed visuals. There are three external cameras (two adjustable "helicopters" and one trackside "spotter") a cab camera with up to five different views depending on the cab, and a mouse-and-keyboard controlled passenger camera. Yes, you can actually ride as a passenger (allowing the computer to control the train) and pan the camera around the faithfully recreated insides of the cab in full 3D. The trains are modeled accurately both inside and out, right down to the logos and paint.

Is this the train simulator that enthusiasts have been waiting for? It's attractive, and it's certainly got the feature list to make the grade. We'll find out when it rolls into the station this spring. —*Matthew Peckham*

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RP

EA GAMES

briefs

remember horror film alumnus John Carpenter's 1982 movie *The Thing*, but London-based developer Computer Artworks (creator of *Evolva*) are betting that you do. They have secured the license from Universal Studios to develop a game based on the sci-fi thriller. The game will reportedly pick up where the movie left off, and will offer a mix of survival horror (a la *Resident Evil*), action, and science fiction. The title is due to be published in the first quarter of 2002 on nearly every platform imaginable—PC, PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube, and Gameboy Advance... **Fox Interactive backs out of the publishing business**—Fox interactive is backing out of the publishing business, according to a recent press release, and plans to restructure its business model around "co-publishing partnerships" with established PC game publishers and distributors. Details regarding the specific publishers that Fox plans to work with are unavailable at this time, but Fox says that it will release further details in the near future. Fox does not seem to be making any major changes to its existing product lineup, which includes television and movie properties such as *Aliens* and

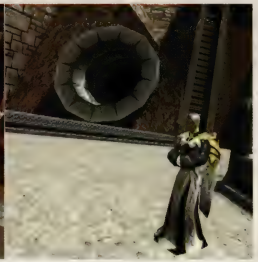
A Gathering of Spies

Buffy the Vampire Slayer, as well as original games such as *No One Lives Forever*... **Book deal**—John Altman, a contributor to this magazine since 1996, has landed a publishing deal for his first novel, *A Gathering of Spies*. Set in 1943, Altman's tale of espionage involves the development of the atom bomb, Operation Double Cross, and the anti-Hitler conspiracy. It marries the plots of Katarina Heinrich, spy of the Third Reich, and a British double agent, Winterbotham, whose wife is incarcerated in a Polish prison camp. Altman is currently working on his second book, but *A Gathering of Spies* can be found in finer bookstores across the country or online from retailers like amazon.com...**FASA shutting down**—"After 20 happy-and difficult-years in business, >>>

Consoling Role-playing

Summoner brings console fighting to a fantasy world

he decoration is good, but I don't think they got the floors quite level here.



Orifices of unusual size? I don't think they exist.

AT FIRST GLANCE, THE STORY BEHIND VOLITION'S *Summoner* is all too familiar: you're a misfit with special powers whose coming is foretold in a prophecy, and powerful forces are looking to find and control you. Your character, Joseph, has the unique ability to summon monsters to help him defeat bad guys (hence the game's name). In addition, you'll gather three buddies together to form a party of four for adventuring. It's all fairly standard stuff.

As Joseph progresses through the game, he'll find ancient rings that allow him to summon ever more powerful creatures, and you combine the rings to summon even more different types of monsters. There are around 20 summonables, from minotaurs to imps to stone golems. Joseph's beasts need not just be mindless fighting machines, as many of them have considerable spellcasting prowess. You have to exercise a bit of caution when summoning, since if Joseph is weakened or incapacitated, they can go out of control, being more of a menace than what you expected to fight.

Even the shepherds are pretty fierce.

Volition has made considerable effort to take advantage of the PC, as it was co-developed (and is currently available) for the PlayStation 2. PC players will be able to go online and join up in parties, with other players controlling the non-Joseph characters. While the game won't have a level editor, the designers are confident that mod makers won't have trouble populating existing levels with player-designed monsters and equipment.

Though the combat is turn-based, *Summoner* is as much a fighting game as a role-playing game. Each character has four unique "chain attacks," each delivering a special effect. For example, Joseph's attacks can cripple an opponent's movement or fighting, deal extra damage, or drain away ability points. You can string together chain attacks to inflict a series of devastating moves, thus gaining extra moves in combat, although your character generally needs to be fairly skilled and wield the right kinds of weapons to do this.

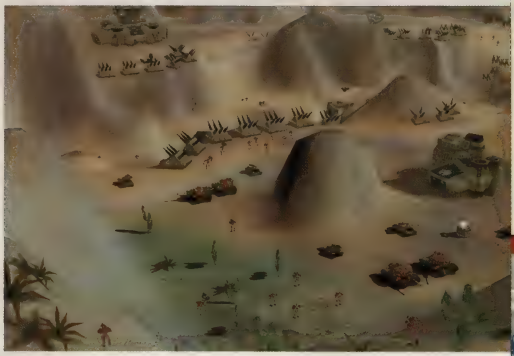
The main story of the game will take around 35 hours to complete, although pursuing all the side quests could add another ten. It's also loaded with voice-acted cut scenes, created with the game engine so they'll preserve the feel of the game as you're watching them. One rather pleasing quirk is there's no limit on the inventory, so you can grab anything that isn't nailed down (anyone frustrated by *Diablo II*'s paltry space allowance will appreciate this).

Summoner has a number of good, albeit derivative, ideas: There are bashing hordes of monsters to loot a la *Diablo*, there's investigating an interesting storyline through conversations with non-player characters much like *Baldur's Gate*. However, it's set apart from other games with its summoning feature and slightly more involved combat.

On the downside, the game might be a bit too console-like for some PC gamers, and the PlayStation 2 version has received mostly mediocre reviews. With this in mind, will be interesting to see what changes are in store, and what is added, for the PC version when it's released in March. —*Rick Moscatello*

briefs

FASA Corporation is closing its doors," read a January 25th message on FASA's website. The creators of *Battletech* and other pen-and-paper and boardgames will remain open to fill orders until April 30, 2001. They are selling *Battletech* and *Shadowrun* to Wizkids LLC, a company started by Jordan Weisman, a founder of FASA and the creator of *Battletech*. "I want to thank all of our loyal fans and customers who over these 20 years have made FASA Corporation a fun place to be and a company of which we are very proud," said the statement form owners Morton Weisman and Ross Babcock. ■



I dare ya to try to come here.

Get Some Action

Steel Soldiers takes the simpler path to strategy supremacy

WHEN SOMEONE MENTIONS A REAL-TIME strategy game you think of games where micromanaging resources and having to be fastest on the trigger for the incoming rush of attacking troops is par for the course. Are you growing tired with that formula? Everyone says this, but old-school (we're talking Amiga days) developer The Bitmap Brothers want people to believe their *Steel Soldiers* will inject new life into the genre.

Their intent is to create an action strategy game, one that keeps things very simple. "The forces on both sides are identical," explains lead designer Jamie Barber. "That was a conscious decision because in the original research and design phases, we did have three different races. Now it is reflecting armies with the same technology, same units, and the identity is very strong. If you and I play a game, there is no balancing issue. It doesn't matter how well you balance a game, if you've got different races and everything else, it is different."

Oooh, pretty explosions. Note also the different camouflage look to your units in this forest world.

Steel Soldiers is a sequel to *Z* (pronounced *Zed*), which sold 500,000 copies worldwide. That game mixed action and strategy, and rather than rehash that game, the Bitmaps combed forums, talked to players, and listened to their audience to create the sequels. It will dispense with some of the broad humor that marked the cut scenes but the fundamental gameplay remains the same. You still capture territory, which allows you to build robot production facilities. When you have amassed your army, you use them to defend your home or to conquer enemy territory. You must expand quickly and do it using the units that best offset the enemy's capabilities.

Following through with the action strategy theme, the game doesn't require you to perform research, just find the best way to use what is available at any given time, and you can capture enemy units that may be more advanced than your current level. The game will have a fully customizable interface.

The 3D graphics are attractive, allowing plenty of weather and lighting effects. You see tracks in the sand behind your units as they move. A free moving camera allows you to set the perspective you're most comfortable with. Everything looks and feels very real.

Steel Soldiers looks good, sounds great and plays pretty well even at a somewhat early stage of development. It should be ready for action this spring.
—Merrie Rickmann

TOPsellers

1	THE SIMS Maxis/Electronic Arts Price: $39 • Rating ★★★★ ½	
2	ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON Hasbro Interactive Price $25 • Rating ★★★★ ½	
3	THE SIMS: LIVIN LARGE Maxis Price: $27 • Rating ★★★	
4	WHO...MILLIONAIRE 2ND ED. Disney Price: $18 • Rating N/A	
5	LOOPY LANDSCAPES Hasbro Interactive Price: $26 • Rating ★★★★	
6	SIM THEME PARK Electronic Arts Price: $19 • Rating ★★★★	
7	RED ALERT 2 Westwood Studios Price: $39 • Rating ★★★	
8	EVERQUEST: SCARS OF VELIOUS Sony Price: $19 • Rating ★★★★ ½	
9	BARBIE PET RESCUE Mattel Interactive Price: $27 • Rating N/A	
10	FROGGER 2 Hasbro Interactive Price: $27 • Rating ★★★	

11. Hoyle Casino 2001: Sierra
12. Diablo II: Blizzard
13. Age Of Empires II: Microsoft
14. Deer Hunter 4: Infogrames
15. Who...Millionaire Sports Edition: Disney
16. AOE II: The Conquerors: Microsoft
17. Combat Flight Simulator 2.0: Microsoft
18. Barbie Magic Genie Bottle: Mattel Int.
19. Madden NFL 2001: EA Sports
20. SimCity 3000: Electronic Arts

Source: PC Data, Reston, Virginia. Month of Dec. 2000

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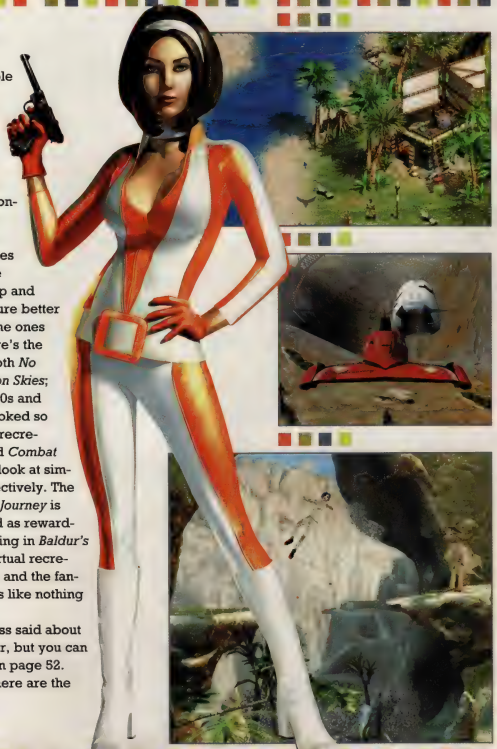
THE YEAR'S BEST

COMPUTER GAMES Best of 2000

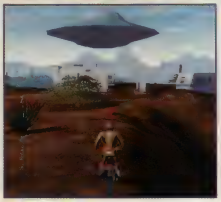
In each of the 10 years of this magazine's existence we've been faced with the formidable task of cutting through the hype, some of it of our own making, to select the best games of the year. For this, the first year of the new millennium, we find gaming at a crossroads, with some traditional styles of games seemingly falling out of favor and being replaced by new hybrid games that mix the old and new. The games that had us standing up and cheering their existence feature better realized virtual worlds than the ones that didn't make the cut. There's the unique alternate-history in both *No One Lives Forever* and *Crimson Skies*; the acid-drenched groovin' 60s and WWII aerial combat never looked so vivid. The superb battlefield recreations in both *Steel Beasts* and *Combat Mission* redefine the way we look at simulations and wargames respectively. The epic storyline in *The Longest Journey* is deeper than most novels, and as rewarding. The old-school role-playing in *Baldur's Gate II* is perhaps the best virtual recreation of *Dungeons & Dragons*, and the fantastical realm from *Sacrifice* is like nothing you've seen before.

And the worst? Well, the less said about the bottom feeders, the better, but you can read about them and weep on page 82.

So without further delays, here are the best games of the year 2000.



r Classic Game of the Year Add-on of the Year Online Game of the Year Racing Game of the Year
Strategy Game of the Year Role-playing Game of the Year Action Game of the Year Game of the Year



Crimson Skies

Developer Zipper Interactive
Publisher Microsoft

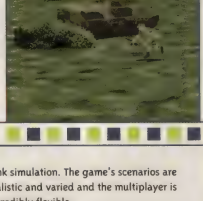
Some games have a premise so unique and engaging that it both reminds you why you started playing computer games in the first place and also how derivative most games really are. *Crimson Skies* is one of those kinds of games, and despite a problem out of the gate with bugs, it still manages to ooze style while being backed up with seriously entertaining gameplay. Set in some sort of alternate-history 1937, you play Nathan Zachary, air pirate, as you join together with a band of merry brigands roaming the perilous skies above the warring nation-states of America, searching for fame and fortune in your stolen battle zeppelin.

With stellar aerial combat and physics that are entertaining, and even somewhat plausible, the game's missions do an excellent job of drawing out your inner Errol Flynn with a constantly varying array of challenges and objectives that keep things interesting and ensure that each escapade is more outrageous than the last. The pacing is always quick and snappy, and your objectives are constantly changing. Overall, developer Zipper does a great job of trimming out anything that stands in the way of fun.

FINALISTS

MechWarrior 4: Vengeance
Developer **FASA Interactive**
Publisher **Microsoft**

Tachyon: The Fringe
Developer **NovaLogic**
Publisher **NovaLogic**



Steel Beasts

Developer eSim Games
Publisher Shrapnel Games

In another case of "little guys do hardcore gamers good," *Steel Beasts* does what nothing from the major publishers has yet done well—it represents modern tank combat in a way that causes you to go, "Wow!" even as you're getting pummeled. The stars of the show are the U.S. M1A1 Abrams and the German Leopard 2A4 main battle tanks, and the differences in the tanks are nicely captured–you really feel like you're in two different tanks, not just the same tank with different interface graphics.

A series of tutorials eases you into the game, but don't be fooled—while the game is easy to play, it's very hard to play well. It doesn't cater to beginners, instead focusing on those looking for a realistic and hardcore tank simulation. The game's scenarios are realistic and varied and the multiplayer is incredibly flexible.

It's hard to imagine why major publishers passed on this gem, as it is the best simulation of modern tank (and maybe just tank, period) operations ever.

FINALISTS

Comanche Versus Hokum
Developer **Razorworks**
Publisher **Empire Interactive**

Jane's F/A-18
Developer **Jane's Combat Simulations**
Publisher **Jane's Combat Simulations**

American McGee's "Name Above the Title" Award
American McGee's Alice's American McGee

Most Annoying Trend
Name above the title credit

Most Spot-On Title
The Untouchable

Most Overused Terrain/Environments
Lava; Sewers; Dungeons; Warehouses

Lamest Ending
Daikatana (we can only assume, since a bug prevented us from finishing it)

Biggest Disaster We All Saw Coming
Daikatana

Best High-Value BudgetWare
Dirt Track Racing: Sprint Cars

Best Post-Release (Non-Athletic) Support
Epic Games for Unreal Tournament; Valve Software for Half-Life; Big Time Software for Tropical Mimes

Most Likely to Offend Women and/or Religious Folks
Messiah

Combat Mission: Beyond Overlord

Developer Big Time Software
Publisher battlefront.com

Combat Mission: Beyond Overlord is the first truly next-generation product in the wargame genre, blending familiar elements to create an amalgam that transcends past titles. Developer Big Time Software accomplishes this through historical accuracy, graphics perfectly fitted to the topic, and superb gameplay.

Set in WWII, the included scenarios cover every major action between June 1944 and May 1945. The game is fully 3D, giving players an unprecedented look at the battlefield, and its combination of turn-based strategizing and real-time simultaneous execution (called WEGO, as opposed to the standard turn-based "I Go, You Go," system). This system allows players time to consider moves while retaining the suspense and action of seeing armed men and steel collide on the battlefield.

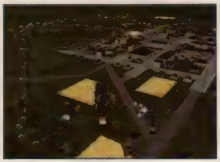
The game is also receiving an enormous amount of post-release support, both from its developer and, more tellingly, its players. Internet multiplayer has been added to the game, and there's a burgeoning Mod scene that has actually improved the game's visual appeal by providing enhanced terrain, buildings, and unit graphics.

All in all, *Combat Mission* represents a major leap forward in wargaming.

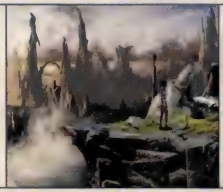
FINALISTS

Panzer Campaigns: Normandy '44
Developer John Tiller
Publisher HPS

Rising Sun
Developer TalonSoft
Publisher TalonSoft



Adventure>



The Longest Journey

Developer Funcom
Publisher Funcom

Though it took a while to finally reach the shores of America, Funcom's superlative *The Longest Journey* proves worth the wait. You play April Ryan, a young art student who finds herself with the unenviable task of saving two worlds—Stark and Arcadia—the realms of science and magic. Armed with a smart mouth and a quick wit, she soon emerges as a character that you can't help but cheer for.

At its core a traditional point-and-click third-person perspective adventure stuffed with all sorts of beautifully varied locations, *The Longest Journey* somehow puts the classic heroic quest in a new context. It's distinguished by the skilled storytelling of writer and designer Ragnar Tornquist. Like a good novel, his plot pulls you in until the wee hours of the morning and you find yourself caring about what happens next. The story is multi-tiered, with April's quest built on a foundation of mythological detail that would make Bullfinch proud.

Funcom has embraced all that is good about the genre and created an exceptional game experience; this game is cause for celebration.

FINALISTS

Escape from Monkey Island
Developer LucasArts
Publisher LucasArts

Real Myst
Developer Cyan
Publisher Mattel

NHL 2001

Developer EA Sports
Publisher EA Sports

After a few years of treading water, EA Sports' *NHL* series finally stands atop the PC hockey hill as the undisputed king of the genre. Its completely redesigned artificial intelligence is the key, and when you combine that with the fast-paced and plausibly realistic gameplay, you have a winner of a game. And who could ignore that legendary EA Sports presentation—visually, the game has no equal in the realm of PC sports.

While it retains most of the features of the previous year's edition, the gameplay has been tuned and tweaked to such an extent that it feels like an entirely new game, making it arguably the best hockey game to ever grace a computer screen. It plays a competitive game, is loaded with options, and looks gorgeous. What more could you ask for?

FINALISTS

PGA Championship Golf 2000
Developer Headgate
Publisher Sierra

Sammy Sosa High Heat Baseball 2001
Developer 3DO
Publisher 3DO

Age of Empires II: The Conquerors

Developer Ensemble Studios
Publisher Microsoft

It's not as if *Age of Empires II* was lacking in any particularly category, but leave it up to Ensemble Studios to somehow manage to take the game to another level. *The Conquerors* adds four new campaigns as well as new cultures and unique units to the mix, tweaks the interface a bit (queued farms... finally), delivers new maps, terrain sets...it is, in short, everything an expansion pack should be. It manages to improve an already stellar game, adds a helpful and interesting stack of new features, and like its parent game is technically solid, well balanced, and so much fun that you may not need another old-school real-time strategy game.

FINALISTS

RollerCoaster Tycoon: Loopy Landscapes
Developer Chris Sawyer
Publisher Hasbro Interactive

The Sims: Livin' Large
Developer Maxis
Publisher Maxis

CHOICE PICKS

A Barbie Future

William Abner: When I look back at the year 2000, one event stands out more than any other: the birth of my daughter, Ashley Elizabeth. I'm sure that over the next few years my "top games" list will include such titles as "The Mystery of Barbie's Missing Sports Car" and "Barney Sings the Blues." But until the day arrives when Ashley takes over the family's fast PC, the list belongs to me! I fully realize a few of the games mentioned are not technically "2000 games" but this is my list, damn it, and I'm going with the games that I enjoyed playing the most this year:

My Picks
Age of Wonders
Baldur's Gate II
High Heat Baseball 2001
NHL 2001
System Shock 2
Unreal Tournament

Rest In Peace Award
Looking Glass Studios, Inc.

Least Edgy Edgy Game
American McGee's Alice

Most Overused Enemy
Robotic frogs (once was enough)

Best Worst Fighting Game
The Untouchable

Motocross Madness 2

Developer Rainbow Studios
Publisher Microsoft

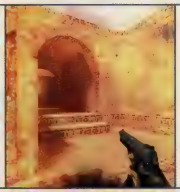
> *Motocross Madness 2* is one of those games that make you want to gush. The one thing that keeps running through your mind while playing is... this is a really, really, truly, seriously, staggeringly... fun game. If you don't have a stupid grin while playing this game, you may very well be dead. The grins come from a multitude of sources. There are the clever tracks, with tons of details that you begin to notice after multiple laps. There are the perfectly tuned controls, the terrific physics engine and the jaw-droppingly amazing graphics. But the biggest grins come from... crashing and the grievous acts of bodily harm this game perpetrates on its virtual riders.

FINALISTS

Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed
Developer **Electronic Arts**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Superbike 2001
Developer **Milestone**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Online>



Half-Life: Counter-Strike

Developer Minh Le/Valve
Publisher Sierra

> Born over a year ago as a free downloadable multiplayer modification for *Half-Life, Counter-Strike* has been through at least seven incarnations (betas) worth of improvements and additions. On any given day, no other multiplayer first-person shooter matches its popularity, not *Quake III Arena*, not *Unreal Tournament*, not even *Deer Hunter 4*.

Created by a team of gamers lead by Minh "Gooseman" Le, *Counter-Strike* is an everyman's (or woman's) riff on the in-your-face *Rainbow Six/Rouge Spear/SWAT 3* tactical team shooter, minus the complexities of waypoints or mission planning. It's all about execution. It's about intense close quarters combat. Good guys and bad guys hunting each other down, rescuing hostages, planting virtual bombs. Fun is the operative word. In fact it's way too much fun-the game is addicting. Frightfully so. It will invade your thoughts while you are on the job. It has turned nice quiet bucolic dreams into adrenaline pumping orgies of blood and bullets. It's a heart-pounding, visceral experience that gets under your skin. When played properly, with teamwork that clicks like a well-oiled machine, the game offers a sense of accomplishment and comradery that is simply amazing.

FINALISTS

Allegiance
Developer **Microsoft**
Publisher **Microsoft**

EverQuest: Ruins of Kunark
Developer **Verant**
Publisher **Sony**

Classic>

Shanghai Second Dynasty

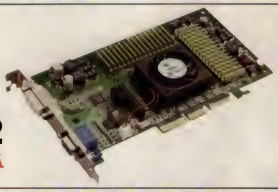
Developer Quicksilver Software
Publisher Activision

> The matching tiles game of *Shanghai* isn't exactly the most complex in existence, but *Shanghai: Second Dynasty* exorcises every possible excuse to resist the temptation to play. With its veritable army of tile sets, game types, house rules and eye-pleasing rewards, it attracts addicts of every age, from children to adults to "advanced children with wrinkles." Few packages come close to the utter completeness and provision for just about everyone as this one does.

FINALISTS

Fritz 6
Developer **Chessbase**
Publisher **Chessbase**

Sheep
Developer **Minds Eye Productions**
Publisher **Empire**



GeForce 2

Manufacturer NVIDIA

NVIDIA continues to refine and improve its superb 3D accelerator chipset with the GeForce 2 chipset. Offering insane fill rates in excess of a 1600 megatexels (that's a lot of texel), cool per-pixel effects like bump mapping and an improved transformation and lighting engine that can handle a peak of about 25 million triangles per second. In other words it does a lot of complex stuff to blast the prettiest 3D accelerated images on your screen as fast as possible.

With prices ranging from $200 to nearly $500 for the Ultra models, cards powered by the GeForce 2 are high-end solutions for serious gamers. It's screaming fast, the drivers are stable and optimized, and most importantly the chipset is full of features that will be exploited by more and more games in the months to come.

FINALISTS

Athlon Thunderbird
Manufacturer AMD

Radeon
Manufacturer ATI

CHOICE PICKS

Leave Me Alone

Steve Bauman: I think I officially hate games, but there were some memorable moments from 2000 games: various dialogues in *No One Lives Forever* (Goodman: "I can be subtle." Cate: "Then how do you explain that shirt?"), playing *SWAT 3* co-op at 3:00AM every night for a month or so with a certain special someone and earning the highest medal after smoking the terrorists at the L.A. Convention Center, shooting robotic frogs in *Daikatana*... there were probably more. Ah, the simple pleasures of gaming. But for the love of god, will someone come to my apartment and uninstall *RollerCoaster Tycoon*.

My Picks

A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius (book)
Motocross Madness 2
No One Lives Forever
RollerCoaster Tycoon
The Sims
SWAT 3: Elite Edition

Sidewinder Game Voice

Manufacturer Microsoft

Some people think that voice communications in games is the wave of the future, and the SideWinder Game Voice is the first truly complete voice product that gets almost everything just right. While the software isn't anything special (though it will likely evolve and improve), the hardware is; the small puck-shaped device features a headphone jack (eliminating the need to crawl behind your PC), volume control, and a series of buttons that allow you to quickly send commands to individuals or your entire team.

FINALISTS

ProMedia v.2·400 Speakers
Manufacturer Klipsch

Sidewinder Strategic Commander
Manufacturer Microsoft

Most Mullets Per Level
The Untouchable

Least Disappointing Game You Couldn't Finish Due to Bugs
Daikatana

Most Living Up to It's Name
Duke Nukem (taking) Forever (to complete)

RATING PENDING
RP
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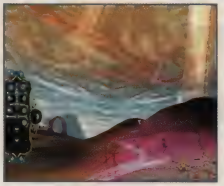
Sacrifice

Developer Shiny Entertainment
Publisher Interplay

> This hybrid is the action gamer's thinking game, a gorgeous, polished and groundbreaking game from a somewhat unlikely source, Shiny Entertainment, best known for slightly warped action games like *Earthworm Jim* and *MDK*. You control a wizard from a third-person view that, much like *Battlezone*, directly commands units on the field of battle; this perspective puts you right in the thick of battle, with all the action and confusion which that entails.

The terrific gameplay is backed up with Shiny's trademark style. The art-direction is a colorful mix of Dr. Seuss and Shiny's own *MDK*, and the landscapes stretch out far into the distance—climbing to the top of a tall hill and seeing the entire battlefield laid out before you is exhilarating. The game's creatures are unique, with terrific animation.

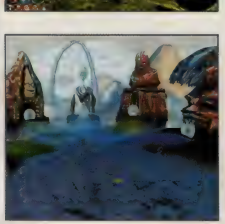
Sacrifice eliminates much of the micromanagement and complex planning of other real-time strategy games—it's more about frenetic mayhem than careful planning. It's also a fantastic game, one that defies expectations both for the genre and the developer.



FINALISTS

Ground Control
Developer **Massive Entertainment**
Publisher **Sierra**

Warlords Battlecry
Developer **SSG**
Publisher **SSI**

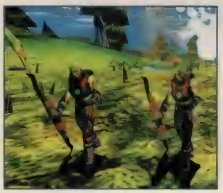


CHOICE PICKS

A Long Journey

Ben Sones: What can I say? It was a good year for action games. It was a not-so-good year for adventure games, but then again the one standout title is the best adventure game I've played in ages, and quite possibly my favorite game of 2000. Here's hoping developers follow *The Longest Journey*'s lead in 2001...

My Picks
The Longest Journey
Motocross Madness 2
No One Lives Forever
Sacrifice
Thief II: The Metal Age



CHOICE PICKS

The Odd Appeal of Clicking

Jason Cross: I was really disappointed by real-time strategy games this year. Sure, there were some good ones, but no single game grabbed me enough to want to play it to completion. Both *Counter-Strike* and *No One Lives Forever* were nice surprises, though. I honestly didn't expect a MOD to grab me like that, and *NOLF*...well...it just does so many things right it's hard to fault it for any minor flaws. And why did I play roughly 200 hours of *Diablo II* when it's not that great?

My Picks
No One Lives Forever
Half Life: Counterstrike
RollerCoaster Tycoon
Diablo II
Deus Ex

Best Use of Stereotyped Voice Acting
Daikatana

Most Likely To Cause Excessive Weight Gain Due To Inactivity
EverQuest; Diablo II

Most Powerful Industry Force
The Brothers Mart, Wal- and K-

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Violence
Blood and Gore

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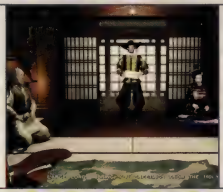


Shogun: Total War

Developer Creative Assembly
Publisher Electronic Arts

> *Shogun: Total War* is a samurai-themed strategy game that is half *Risk*-style turn-based planning and half real-time tactical combat. You take the role of a daimyo of a clan in 16th century feudal Japan and play out epic battles that would make Akira Kurosawa proud. Battles take place on fully 3D battlefields that do a terrific job of capturing the hilly and rugged terrain of Japan. The transition from the turn-based wrapper (where you do your planning) to real-time play is nearly seamless, which is a real tribute to the fundamentally sound design of the game.

There's a lot variety in the game, with no two games ever feeling the same. Developer The Creative Assembly has done a great job capturing the flavor of its fascinating setting. And as a game, it's also good enough to have also received consideration in both the real-time strategy and wargame categories.

FINALISTS

The Sims
Developer **Maxis**
Publisher **Maxis**

Starfleet Command Volume II: Empires at War
Developer **Taldren**
Publisher **Interplay**

Most Never-ending
Daikatana

Groovy Tunes Award
No One Lives Forever

Best Bad Cutscenes
Daikatana

Best Excuse for Broadband
Half-Life: Counterstrike

Biggest Waste of 90 Minutes
Timeline

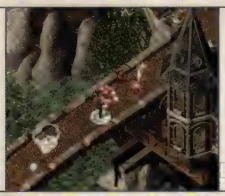
CHOICE PICKS

Dance!

Tricia Gray: I've always fancied games you can get deeply wrapped up with, like the time I played Sony of Japan's *Kowloon's Gate*; granted I didn't know what the hell was actually going on (I am sure some of you know what I mean), but I couldn't put it down in fear of missing something. Then there are games that are so fun, it's funny! Playing *The Sims* gave me the giggles; I mean, the mere concept of the game is just hilarious. If you don't believe me, just explain it to a non-gamer. It was also a great year for *D&D* fans with the 3rd Edition coming out. But here's some advice for you: if you're looking for a multiplayer game that's easy to pick up, get the Simpson's version of *Clue*. I think I spent more hours playing that last month than anything else. And for those of you that have bad days, take $10 to your local arcade and get up on some *Samba de Amigo*. A couple rounds of that will find you some joy.

My Picks

Dungeons and Dragons 3rd Edition
Gran Turismo 2
Samba De Amigo
The Simpsons Clue
The Sims



Baldur's Gate II

Developer BioWare
Publisher Black Isle

Two years ago *Baldur's Gate* was the year's best role-playing game (as well as our "Game of the Year"), and last year *Planescape Torment* took the crown. Interplay's Black Isle gets the trifecta this year; despite increased expectations, developer BioWare still managed to deliver what was by far the year's best role-playing game, a sequel that expands and improves every aspect of the acclaimed original. A classic old-school hack-and-slash role-playing game, it delivers scads of gameplay (50–200 hours, depending on your style of play), a simple plot that builds up to something far more interesting than your standard "kill the ultimate personification of evil" and tons of sidequests and objects to discover.

This isn't just a good game; it's a great one. BioWare has mastered this style of isometric pseudo-real-time role-playing, and there's little you can think of that would make the game better. It's a fantastic way to spend countless hours of your time (and you will), and it provides solid gameplay. Outstanding writing combined with a good plot, beautiful graphics and an engrossing soundtrack places *Baldur's Gate II* firmly alongside some of the best role-playing games ever created.

CHOICE PICKS

It's Cold Here

Bill Hiles: My first year with *CGM* wraps up with *Counter-Strike* and *No One Lives Forever* still taking up far too much of my dwindling free time. At least it keeps this Texan from brooding too much about all the cold white stuff that keeps falling from the sky. And what's with all this skiing? Back where I come from you need water and a powerboat. It was a pretty good year for games, I suppose, and even flight sims attempted a comeback of sorts (no thanks to a couple of major gaffs by Hasbro). The first five minutes of *Beach Head 2000* were memorable, as were the middle three minutes of the first 12 minutes of *Codename: Eagle*. And thanks to Erik Wolpaw, the image of Audrey Hepburn being lodged in my throat lingers (see the *Sacrifice* review in the February issue).

My Picks

Age of Empires II: The Conquerors
Baldur's Gate II
Combat Mission
Half-Life: Counter-Strike
No One Lives Forever

FINALISTS

Diablo II
Developer Blizzard Entertainment
Publisher Blizzard Entertainment

Deus Ex
Developer ION Storm
Publisher Eidos Interactive

Most Likely to be Blamed for Poor Earnings
PlayStation 2

Best Endless Dialogues that Are Worth Listening To
No One Lives Forever

Best Endless Dialogues that Are Worth Reading
The Longest Journey

Best Implementation of Goats
No One Lives Forever

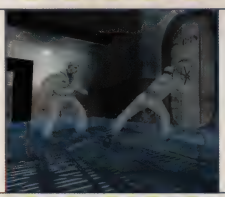
CHOICE PICKS

Digital Addictions

Cindy Yans: I believe that as a recovering *EverQuest* addict in a twelve step program, I should have really tried harder to adhere to the Sixth Step, which is "Avoid the mention of, or especially the touting of *EverQuest* in public forums, lest you cause others to fall by the wayside." Nonetheless, these are excellent add-ons and had to be noted, even to the exclusion of other wonders such as *Deus Ex*, *Sacrifice*, and *South Park: Chef's Luv Shack*.

My Picks

Age of Empires II: The Conquerors
Baldur's Gate II
EverQuest: Ruins of Kunark
EverQuest: Scars of Velious
No One Lives Forever



No One Lives Forever

Developer Monolith
Publisher Fox Interactive

> While people were complaining about games with hackneyed settings (oh look, it's science fiction and/or fantasy) one company went against the grain and created the year's most vivid game, both in a literal and figurative sense. Monolith's *No One Lives Forever*, set in a swinging 60s that only exists on film and in our collective drug damaged memories, stars the cat-suited "Operative" Cate Archer, a former thief turned agent for secret spy outfit UNITY. She's having a difficult time earning acceptance when a mysterious criminal from an organization called H.A.R.M. begins killing off UNITY agents. Minus half their operatives, UNITY has to give Archer a break. The unfolding plot is straight out of a spy movie; it's cheesy, kitschy fun, though it's played pretty straight.

No One Lives Forever's superb single-player experience rivaled only by the big boys of the genre, the *Half-Life*s and *System Shock*s. It's full of surprises and twists and is sort of the anti-shooter shooter, an action game with a thoroughly refreshing setting, varied gameplay, superb dialogue and voice acting, and downright fun game mechanics that are a shock to the system. If *Half-Life* and *System Shock 2* raised our expectations for the genre, *No One Lives Forever* stands proudly (or in the context of the game, "slinks seductively") next to those gold standard games.

FINALISTS

Deus Ex
Developer **ION Storm**
Publisher **Eidos Interactive**

Thief II: The Metal Age
Developer **Looking Glass Studios**
Publisher **Eidos Interactive**

Longest In Development Without Looking Its Age
Giants: Citizen Kabuto

Best 3D Graphics That Amazingly Like High-Quality Rendered 2D Graphics
RealMyst

Best Voice Acting
Cast: No One Lives Forever

Bumpiest Launch
PlayStation 2: Pentium 4

Best Reason for the Existence of 3D Audio
Thief II: The Metal Age

Most Ignored Fact
Most of the best-selling games of the year didn't feature any violent content whatsoever.

GNOMESPICKS

Hybrid Heaven

Robert Mayer: I love first-person shooters and role-playing games, which explains why I enjoyed *No One Lives Forever* and *Deus Ex* so much. The former is the best single-player pure shooter since *Half-Life*, and maybe the best ever, while the latter is one of the two best integrations of role-playing and first-person action since the original *System Shock* (the other being *System Shock 2*). *Combat Mission* is simply the most important computer wargame ever made, and one of the most entertaining. *Diablo II* is one of the better multiplayer games out there, and the best action RPG ever. And *The Conquerors*? Well, lets just say I play this one nearly every single night, usually cooperatively. Real-time strategy simply doesn't get much better than this.

My Picks

Age of Empires II: The Conquerors
Combat Mission
Deus Ex
Diablo II
No One Lives Forever

What Does Not Kill You, Will Make You Wish It Had.

Clive Barker's Undying

Live the Horror. Or Die Trying.

From the diabolical mind of Clive Barker comes a harrowing tale of sibling rivalry gone too far - all the way to the grave. Confront and conquer your worst fears as you unravel a dark familial curse and pit yourself against the supernatural. Don't be afraid of the dark. Be afraid of what lurks within it.

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MATURE M

COMPUTER GAMES Best of 2000

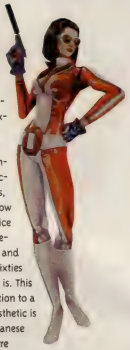
No One Lives Forever

Developer Monolith
Publisher Fox Interactive

In the two years since *Half-Life* raised expectations for first-person action games, no other has come close to equaling its heady combination of action, exploration, perfectly timed and scripted events, superb AI and compelling environments. Until now. Maybe, just maybe, *No One Lives Forever* is a better game than *Half-Life*. That may be heresy to some, but consider this: it never missteps, even when it's going all over the map (both literally and figuratively) in gameplay styles and level designs. Its AI is superb—perhaps not the equal of *Half-Life*, but close enough. It has tons of scripted events and by far the best in-engine cut scenes of any game in the genre.

But we're here not to offer comparisons but to praise Monolith's sublime creation. Who'd have guessed the developer of *Blood II* would come back with a game this strong and polished, one that has almost a perfect execution of its central concept. It emerges from the gloomy dungeon that games seem eternally trapped in and explodes on your screen in all of its cheesy day-glow glory.

It shouldn't work as well as it does; the overly disparate settings (Morocco, forests, the snowy Alps, tropical islands, German nightclubs, space stations), the different styles of gameplay (stealth, almost *Virtua Cop*-style target gallery, the "skydiving without a parachute" level)... this much variety usually turns most games into an incoherent mess. The folks at Monolith manage to tie it all together in large part due to the game's plotline and the conventions of the spy movie genre. As with a James Bond movie, you expect exotic locales, funny accents and evil protagonists having absurdly extravagant lairs hidden behind a bookcase. It's all part of the charm.



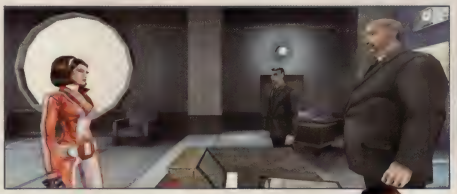
The designers do a fantastic job of maintaining a consistent world vision—sixties style permeates every aspect of the game including clothing, cars, interior decoration, game menus, you name it. Every now and again you'll notice something like a typewriter or refrigerator and marvel at how very sixties such a common item is. This single-minded devotion to a consistent design aesthetic is something many Japanese console developers are praised for, and something first-person shooter designers would do well to study.

No One Lives Forever also constantly varies the pacing, moving between action-filled shootouts, tension-filled stealth missions and even some adventure-style conversations. It never settles into a routine, and you're never quite sure what to expect next.

The overall production values are fantastic, clever writing (some of the incidental overheard dialogue from the enemy soldiers is terrific; it's worth replaying the game just to take it all in) with professional looking cut scenes and superb voice acting. Special mention must be given to what is perhaps the best interactive music

seen in an action game; the score would do Bond composer John Barry proud. The motifs mesh perfectly, mirroring the action, and you'll be humming the theme song for days. "And no one lives for-e-ver...."

After finishing the game, you're left remembering the game's brilliant moments; riding motorcycles over villains, shooting down helicopters from gondolas, ejecting from exploding space stations ... it's all in a days work for the year's grooviest secret agent in the year's best game. □



The Operatives

FRONT LEFT TO RIGHT: Samantha Ryan, **Producer** David Longo, **Lead 3D Artist** John Mulkey, **Level Designer** Wes Saulsberry, **Art Lead** Dan Miller, **PR/QA** Brian Davis, **2D Artist** Dan Berke, **Engineer MIDDLE SITTING LEFT TO RIGHT:** Brian Pamintuan, **Sound Designer** Craig Hubbard, **Lead Game Designer** Kevin Stephens, **Lead Engineer** Chris Hewett, **Director of Development BACK STANDING LEFT TO RIGHT:** Unknown Guy, **Barfly** Akika Tanaka, **2D/3D Artist** Kevin Francis, **Engine Engineer** Scott Albaugh, **2D/3D Artist** James Ackley, **Lead Sound Designer** Brian Long, **AI and Animation Engineer** Jim Geldmacher, **Engineer** Bill Vandervoort, **Lead Level Designer** Sasha Runnels, **2D Artist** Andy Grant, **3D Artist** Jay Fuller, **Level Designer** Cassano Thruston, **Sound Designer** Bob Givnin, **QA NOT PICTURED:** Jon Gramlich, **QA Lead** Eric Kohler, **Character Art Direction** Steve Lee, **2D Artist** Frank Rooke, **Level Designer** Jonathan Stein, **QA**

A New Era Has Begun...

Cossacks - European Wars is a historical real-time strategy based on events during the XVI-XVIII centuries in Europe when nations and states were created and demolished, gold was turned into numerous armies, and never ending wars shed oceans of blood.

Features:

-Huge battles up to 8000 units
-16 rivaling nations with their own distinct graphics, economics and technical development
-More than 85 real historical large-scale wars and battles of XVI-XVIII centuries
-A huge technological hierarchy of more than 300 upgrades
-Unlimited variety of tactical and strategic methods of land or sea war against enemies
-Full 3D landscape with real world physics

Cossacks
- European Wars

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The Year's Worst

Bad games need love too

No one intentionally makes a bad game—they just happen. It's a combination of things, and no two bad games have the same story. Sometimes it's a lack of money, which forces corners to be cut. Sometimes it's a lack of time, which causes a game to be rushed before it's completed and fine-tuned. And sometimes it's... well, if we can agree there is actual skill involved in producing an award-winning game like the ones you've just read about on previous pages then we have to believe some people are just... less skilled. It's impossible to say which category the following games fall into, but that's pretty much irrelevant; they ain't good.

Beach Head 2000

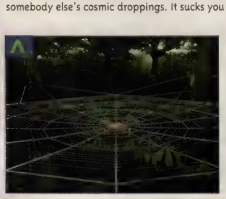
Developer **Digital Fusion**
Publisher **WizardWorks**

For those who thought the Omaha beach sequence in *Saving Private Ryan* was pretty cool, here's your game. This beach out beyond your invisible but magically shielded bunker is your killing field—and killing is your business. And business is very good. You just shoot wave after wave of anonymous marines. It's all very Zen.

Beyond Atlantis

Developer **Cryo Interactive**
Publisher **Dreamcatcher Interactive**

While Atlantis seems like a natural setting for an engaging puzzle game, this ain't it. The tasks set before you are menial and surprisingly labyrinthine, and simply navigating the environments is a chore. Every mini-quest is so prolonged that you look forward to swapping out the next CD just for one little rush of accomplishment. The box invites you to "step into the land of dreams and legends" and immediately sets you to work scrubbing floors, threading needles, picking up somebody else's cosmic droppings. It sucks you right to the bottom.



Daikatana

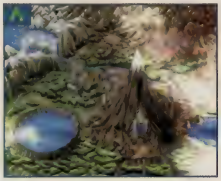
Developer **ION Storm**
Publisher **Eidos Interactive**

Two words: robotic frogs. In all seriousness, John Romero's long-delayed magnum opus did provide a lot of gameplay; tons of weapons, monsters, levels, etc. While that's commendable, playing the game is laborious. It feels like there's nothing holding it all together, that it's just a mishmash of elements "borrowed" from other games. And despite being really, really late, it featured game-killing bugs that made it impossible to finish. Patches fixed that (of course), but they couldn't salvage what was ultimately an entirely mediocre-to-bad game that was only memorable for its train-wreck of a development.

Blaze & Blade

Developer **T&E Soft**
Publisher **Southpeak Interactive**

Fans of role-playing games often bite at any title that appears in the genre, and rarely is that statement more appropriate. This game bites too. The plot is nonexistent, the combat dreadful and repetitive and it has what is perhaps the worst interface known to man.

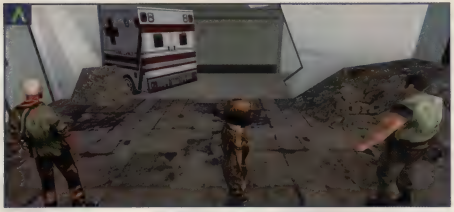


Freedom: First Resistance

Developer Red Storm Entertainment

Publisher Red Storm Entertainment

Adapted from a series of books by Anne "Dragonriders of Pern" McCaffrey, this game just seems tired from the get-go. A lot of unprintable words come to mind when considering the gameplay; the dull puzzles, the uninspiring combat. The game crashes frequently, the graphics mediocre, the characters stereotypes... you get the idea.



Star Trek New Worlds

Developer 14 Degrees East

Publisher Interplay

This is a perfect example of why fans are skeptical about any *Star Trek* game. Wrongly conceived from the start (a traditional ground-based real-time strategy game set in the *Star Trek* universe?), it features a poor interface, a paucity of features, no mid-mission saves, poor graphics... oh the horror! The horror!

THE FINAL WORD ON 2000

Winners	Losers
Monolith	**Gamers**
Ion Storm (Austin) *Deus Ex was exactly the sort of game you'd expect from a bunch of people that came from Looking Glass.*	**Ion Storm (Dallas)** Daikatana was so bad as everyone knows, and Anachronox isn't out (but should be right... about... now).
Shiny Entertainment	**Shiny Entertainment**
Planet Moon Studios After years of delays, Giants: Citizen Kabuto finally shipped, and it was at times, brilliant...	**Planet Moon Studios** ...but Giants was also buggy, and the debacle over the release (green blood, covered nipples) was farcical.
Maxis	**G.O.D**
NVIDIA What a year. Savaged 2, Xbox contract, inroads in laptops, integrated sound chips and they ended up acquiring a major competitor.	**3dfx** What a quick fall. History will credit them with essentially creating the modern 3D accelerator, but they blew it when they decided to make their own cards
Chris Sawyer	**John Romero**
Wargamers Direct Internet sales keep a steady flow of quality games coming.	**Flight Simulation Fans** Go ahead and name the simulations worthy released in 2000. If you find out about any, let us know.
Star Trek Fans	**Star Wars Fans**

Sydney 2000

Developer **ATD**

Publisher **Eidos Interactive**

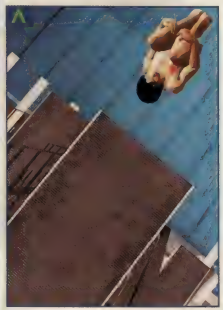
Ah, the old marketing tie-in. Dumped on the market to coincide with the actual summer games, it was a throwback to those wonderful Epyx *Summer* and *Winter* games of the 80s, minus the "wonderful" parts. Gameplay evolves. Really.

Who Wants to Beat Up a Millionaire

Developer **Hypnotix**

Publisher **Simon and Schuster Interactive**

Also known as "who wants to create the most painfully unfunny version of a popular hit show." It's a sort of *You Don't Know Jack* for people that really don't know jack.



Timeline

Developer **Timeline Computer Entertainment**

Publisher **Eidos Interactive**

It's ninety minutes long!

The Untouchable

Developer **Creative Edge Software**

Publisher **Global Star Software**

This wonderful product politely lowers the bar so that games once considered unbelievably bad can now gingerly step over it. Somewhere out there is a Macintosh site featuring a glowing review of this game written by someone named Jason Cross. Please be aware this is not the Jason Cross who works for this publication. Or at least that's what he tells us.

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< Best of 2001

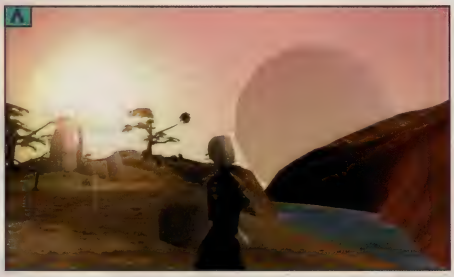
Games (We Think) We Want to Play in 2001

In a shameless attempt to be quoted on boxes throughout the land, here's our list of the games we feel will be the standout products of 2001. Our criteria for selecting these games are simple: we have none. It's our gut instinct. We possess little-to-no insight into whether or not these games will hit some sort of development snag that will keep them from living up to their potential, and we'll probably be wrong, but you can keep the issue around and laugh at us when half of these games end up shipping buggy and/or bad. Figuring out which half will fail is part of the fun....

Anarchy Online

Developer Funcom
Publisher Funcom
Release Date Spring

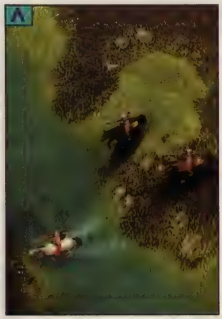
This massively multiplayer online role-playing game is set apart from the competition by its science-fiction setting. The design features elements of other games, from *EverQuest* to *Ultima Online*, and the main intent is to more focus on quests and missions, and to have player-generated as well as auto-generated content. Although you will be able to play solo, a party system will be more conducive to success. Many of the character professions will be geared toward skills other than combat, although combat will certainly be central to gameplay. So look for skills such as medicine and engineering to round out your party. The bureaucrat character, for example, will be good at interaction with the game's non-player controlled characters, information-gathering and simple nano-technology, and the engineer will be able to repair technological objects.and create simple gadgets. With attractive 3D graphics and an impressively ambitious design, look for this game to provide strong competition for the current batch of massively multiplayer games currently available.



Battle Realms

Developer Liquid Entertainment
Publisher Crave
Release Date Summer

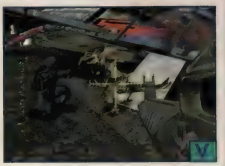
Set in feudal Japan, this real-time strategy game comes from one of the creators of *Command & Conquer*, Ed Del Castillo. Not only does it mix Asian-style units and settings with standard fantasy themes such as magic and lycanthropy, it also uses its 3D engine to full effect. Terrain really plays an important part in gameplay—high ground improves field of vision, adds power to attacks made on enemies at a lower elevation, and occasionally offers a fabulous opportunity to level an enormous boulder down on an unsuspecting enemy camp. Forests can be used to hide the movement of units (although moving through forest too quickly may startle birds and give away your position), and reduce the effectiveness of archers. The game's resources all have multiple uses, and you'll need to do things like round-up horses for your cavalry or to assist your farmers, or divert water to speed up crop production or assist in putting out fires. All in all, it's an ambitious game that deserves a closer look.

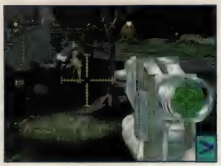


Command & Conquer: Renegade

Developer Westwood Studios
Publisher Electronic Arts
Release Date Summer

Though we were initially somewhat cool to this entire concept, a recent demonstration of the game at Westwood's offices completely changed our perspective on this 3D action game set in the familiar *C&C* universe. While it initially sounded like something of a *Tribes* clone, once you're actually playing the game and moving around out on the battlefield, merely seeing all of those familiar units from a grounds-eye view is quite the sight to behold. The representation of the chaos of the battlefield is superb.





CHOICE PICKS

No More Crying

Wolfgang Kerr: Being the sports junkie that I am, and one that refuses to believe that the "next-generation" consoles are the nail in the PC sports gaming coffin, I cannot wait to see the next version of *High Heat Baseball*. I personally feel it's the best sports series of all time. I'm also a closet role-playing addict and while I'm still waiting for a role-playing game based on the *Warhammer* role-playing game (not the tabletop game), I'm anxious to see if the 2002 lineup is as good as it looks on fact-sheet paper. And I still want a fantasy-themed strategy game that plays like *Shogun: Total War*. Finally, there is sleep... sleep overrides all other 2001 wishes, but anyway, I'm looking forward to:

Best Guesses
Age of Wonders II
Arcanum
High Heat Baseball 2002
Neverwinter Nights
Pool of Radiance

Dreamland Chronicles: Freedom Ridge

Developer Mythos Games
Publisher Bethesda Softworks
Release Date Fall

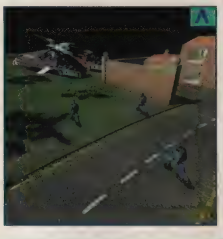
So it has a dumb name, there are two reasons to look forward to this game in 2001: Nick and Julian Gollop. A few years ago they created this game called *X-COM*, and it was good. Really good. Legendary, even. Now they're placing an incredibly similar design (turn-based tactical strategy, strategic wrapper, role-playing stats, open-ended) in a 3D world. Just the thought of taking out more aliens in a fully destructible world, of saving movement points for one burst of fire when attacked, of having randomly generated missions... it's all good. Sign us up.

CHOICE PICKS

Dreaming of Battlecruiser

Cindy Yans: Whether we'll actually see all of these in 2001 is anyone's guess, but certainly, when all else falls by the wayside, there will always be *Battlecruiser Millenium*.

Best Guesses
Anarchy Online
Black & White
Dungeon Siege
Star Wars Galaxies
WarCraft III



DON'T FORGET

Aliens Versus Predator 2

Developer Monolith
Publisher To Be Determined
Release Date Winter 2001

Fresh from the success of our "Game of the Year" *No One Lives Forever*, Monolith takes on the biggest and baddest license out there. The previous version was good; we hope this one is better.

Dungeon Siege

Developer Gas Powered Games
Publisher Microsoft
Release Date Fall 2001

We previewed this game last month but that doesn't make it any less anticipated. The creator of *Total Annihilation* returns with a sort of *Diablo Annihilation*. Think light role-playing, a simple interface and great, great graphics.

The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind

Developer Bethesda Softworks
Publisher Bethesda Softworks
Release Date Summer

Previewed in our December issue, the latest iteration of the *Elder Scrolls* universe features improved 3D graphics and the same depth and open-endedness that marked the previous edition.

Duke Nukem Forever

Developer 3D Realms
Publisher Infogrames
Release Date Pick a date, any date

How could you not include the Duke on any list of "must-see" games for 2001? Even if you think it'll be a *Daikatana*-level disaster you'll need to see it for your own eyes. In development since the dawn of man and with a veil of secrecy around it that's tighter than a cheer... oh wait, the spirit of Duke overtook us there for a second. All anyone really knows about this game is that it's 3D, uses a heavily modified version of the *Unreal* engine and will be full of... stuff. 3D Realms staffers constantly drop vague (and not so vague) hints about what to expect, but don't expect the full story on the game until it's nearly ready to ship. Which, based on past experience, may actually take place some time during the next millennium.

CHOICE PICKS

We're Doomed!

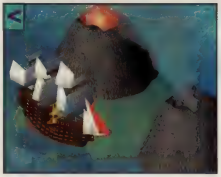
Steve Bauman: Bah! Every game released in 2001 will be as bad as the ones released in 2000. Xbox will kill off the PC and we'll all end up playing fighting games at our TVs for the rest of our miserable lives.

Best Guesses
Civilization III
Daikatana II: Frogs in Space
Freedom: Second Resistance
Mullet Madness: The Untouchable II
Super Mega Crazy Dance Dance Turbo Fencer Revolution X 64 Megamix II: Championship Edition SE
Swamp Buggy Racing II: Swampy's Revenge
Timeline Part Deux

Empire Earth

Developer Stainless Steel Studios
Publisher Sierra On-Line
Release Date Summer

Age of Empires was often called "*Civilization* meets *WarCraft*" (even by us), but that was somewhat misleading. Though it had the historical trappings of *Civilization*, it lacked its epic scope, that idea you were controlling your destiny for thousands of years. Enter *Empire Earth*. Designed by Rick Goodman, who led the original design for *Age of Empires*, it takes the core gameplay of his past game and expands it, allowing you to play a real-time game that starts at the dawn of man and ends with giant mechanized units (you can, however, elect to play single ages at a time). Look for an update on this game next month.



CHOICE PICKS

Pity the Future

Tricia Gray: I have faith in Tom Hall, so I'm looking forward to *Anachronox*. And The Gathering should snap up the rights to make a game based on the *A-Team*. And please Fox, make a Simpsons/Futurama role-playing game.

Best Guesses
Anachronox
A-Team: The Game
Final Fantasy X
Gran Turismo 3 PS2
Phantasy Star Online

Freedom Force

Developer Irrational Games
Publisher Crave
Release Date Fall

All that really needs to be said about this game is this: The creators of *System Shock 2* are working on a squad-based, 3D superhero game. Thinks lots of strange non-trademark infringing superheroes with strange non-trademark infringing powers, spandex tights, destructible environments, role-playing stats and levels, and lots of evil. As this is being typed, we have people in the Boston area visiting Irrational to get the full scoop. Expect more next month.

Emperor: Battle for Dune

Publisher Electronic Arts
Developer Westwood Studios
Release Date Spring

Our December cover story. Westwood finally goes 3D with this good looking and worm-infested real-time strategy game. Expect the same fast gameplay the company is known for, with some of the tweaks fans have asked for.

Freelancer

Developer Digital Anvil
Publisher Microsoft
Release Date Fall

With Chris Roberts leaving Digital Anvil, it makes this epic space simulation even more interesting. Whether it makes it as good a game as envisioned remains to be seen.

Halo

Developer Bungie Software
Publisher Microsoft
Release Date Post-Xbox

We still have pretty high expectations for Bungie's *Tribes*-style 3D indoor/outdoor first-person/third-person action epic, but its status as an Xbox launch title has put its PC and Macintosh development on the back-burner. Don't hold your breath for it in 2001.

Motor City Online

Publisher Electronic Arts
Developer Electronic Arts
Release Date Spring

Though there are plenty of rumors about a troubled development, this is something of a combination of *Need for Speed* with the persistent world of *Diablo II*'s battle.net Realm servers. And if you think the whole bragging/fashion show appeal of the chat areas of battle.net (where your character gets to show off their fashionable attire) is a big deal, wait until it's a line of cars trying to show off their various engine modifications and custom paint jobs. People kill over stuff like that in Southern California.

Neverwinter Nights

Developer BioWare
Publisher Interplay
Release Date Fall

As with *Black & White* [see page 64], this sounds like one of those games you've been waiting for your entire gaming life. BioWare is attempting to not only translate the rules of *Dungeons & Dragons* once again to your PC but also the Dungeon Master experience for multiplayer games. So in addition to having a single-player game *a la* their own *Baldur's Gate* (pumped up with a new and impressive 3D engine), they're also delivering a multiplayer game to die for. Ambitious? You bet. Will it succeed at generating more fan interest than the similar system used in *Vampire the Masquerade*? We'll see.

CHOICE PICKS

A Year Devoid of Suck

Ben Says: How can one not be excited by the prospect of multiplayer role-playing—pen-and-paper style, with a Dungeon Master—over the Internet? Bioware hasn't dropped the ball in the past three years; let's hope they don't pick 2001 as their Year To Suck. As for the Xbox, can any PC game aficionado honestly say that they are not at least curious? Aside from that, I hope to see:

Best Guesses
Freelancer
Neverwinter Nights
Stronghold
Tropico
Xbox

Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor

Developer Stormfront Studios
Publisher SSI
Release Date Spring

SSI set the "gold" standard for *Dungeons & Dragons* based games with the original *Pool of Radiance*, so expectations are high for this *D&D* third-edition game. It looks a bit like *Baldur's Gate*, which is a good thing, only the characters are fully 3D. The gameplay should stay true to the formula established by its predecessors—epic storyline, lots of combat and quests, lots of character stats and classes to fiddle with—and that's a good thing. It will likely get to stores ahead of *Neverwinter Nights*, so those looking for a fix between BioWare epics should find plenty to like with this game.

MechCommander 2

Publisher Microsoft
Developer Microsoft
Release Date Summer

We previewed this in our February issue so rather than rehash that article, let's just say it's Mechs, real-time strategy, 3D graphics with deformable terrain and trees that can be stomped (why is that so appealing?).

NASCAR Racing 4

Developer Papyrus
Publisher Sierra
Release Date February

This should already be on shelves now, but that doesn't make it any less noteworthy as a 2001 release. Match up the *Grand Prix Legends* physics and graphic engine with the appeal of stock car racing and you have quite the heady brew.

Sigma

Developer Relic
Publisher Microsoft
Release Date Winter

The creators of *Homeworld* returns with a real-time strategy game with no units—you create them mixing and matching their genetics. They haven't released any artwork from the game yet, but closed door meetings earlier in 2000 showed one good-looking game.

Return to Castle Wolfenstein

Developer **Gray Matter Studios**
Publisher **Activision**
Release Date **Fall**

Created by the company formerly sorta known as Xatrix (of *Kingpin* fame), this update of the game that put id Software on the 3D map looks pretty wonderful. Though specific details remain somewhat sketchy, there will be lots of Nazis, you'll get to light people and things on fire with a flamethrower (which looks improved over the already excellent one included in *Kingpin*), and it will be violent enough to likely inspire all sorts of congressional action.

CHOICE PICKS

Summertime Blues

Bruce Hughes: In addition to looking forward to the summer of 2001 and foolishly hoping for some peace and quiet and sleep, the big event of the year, personally, is the impending arrival of my firstborn. Hopefully by the time he gets old enough to play computer games *Daikatana* will be remembered with a wistful smile... but maybe this stuff will be okay.

Best Guesses
Age of Sail II
Duke Nukem Forever
Harpoon 4
IL-2 Sturmovik
The Lord of the Rings film
Tropico

Ultima Worlds Online: Origin

Developer **Origin (EA Austin)**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**
Release Date **2001**

Though the name is, quite frankly, pretty stupid, this thorough rethinking of the *Ultima* universe is interesting. Enlisting *Spawn* creator Todd McFarlane as a consultant on monster design, the game mixes medieval, ancient and futuristic civilizations in a really cool and bizarre 3D world. Old-school *Ultima* fans will likely be shocked by the world, but they may be interested in the level of detail being applied to the characters. There is a complex skill system that could allow your character to become a hairdresser (why not?), and they're really working on the appearances of the world's denizens. The level of minutia of the "look" of the characters is extraordinary: Skin color, tattoos, scars, hair color, piercings—your choice. They have put so much into the detailed look of your character, in fact, that they will probably leave the view in sweeping third-person view. The combat is now martial-arts based hand-to-hand combat, there's lots of motion capture... in a sense, it's a true next-generation product, one that's definitely not the same *Ultima* you've grown to know and love.

The Sims Online

Developer **Maxis**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**
Release Date **Winter**

Wherever the Sims go, we're interested in following, and they're heading online. Scheduled ahead of the delayed *Simsville* (which is now a 2002 title), Will Wright's sublime creation is being turned into the ultimate chat room and will likely be huge.

Soldier of Fortune II

Developer **Raven Software**
Publisher **Activision**
Release Date **Fall**

If you thought the original pushed the limits of good taste, the *Quake III*-powered sequel ought to induce all sorts of half-assed legislation.

Star Trek Bridge Commander

Developer **Totally Games**
Publisher **Activision**
Release Date **Summer**

The fine folks that brought you *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter* now try to bring that sort of quality to a *Star Trek* simulation. Hopefully this will get it right and not turn piloting the Enterprise into an arcade game.

CHOICE PICKS

Endless Neverwinter Nights

Ronnie Marcus: Like a lot of us, I'm hoping *Neverwinter Nights* lives up to its promise of bringing computer RPGs closer to their pen and paper counterparts. And I suspect *Return to Wolfenstein* will be a shooter to reckon with. *Harpoon 4* could be very good, if it lives up to billing, and *Dungeon Siege* looks very, very exciting.

Best Guesses

Combat Mission 2
Dungeon Siege
Everything from John Tiller
Harpoon 4
MechCommander 2
Neverwinter Nights
Return to Castle Wolfenstein

CHOICE PICKS

The Year of Role-playing

Jason Cross: I have big hopes that 2001 will be a year of refinement, and lessons learned. With the experience behind *Origin*, it might be the first true second-generation online RPG, and more than just glorified MUD. I love the idea of users making single-player modules with *Neverwinter Nights*, and the tools to do it actually look like a person could use them. If only level design tools for shooters were as easy. Will the next *WarCraft* re-spark my interest in real-time strategy? Will Xbox do for consoles what it has the potential to? I don't know, but I'm dying to find out. The picks:

Best Guesses

Black & White
Neverwinter Nights
Ultima Worlds Online: Origin
WarCraft III
Xbox

Tropico

Developer **Pop Top Software**
Publisher **Gathering of Developers**
Release Date **Spring**

Maybe it's the great cigars or the great hats, but it's okay to admit you have an irrational desire to be Fidel Castro. And maybe you have an irrational desire to play this bright and colorful banana republic strategy game from the creators of *Railroad Tycoon II*. Build hotels, harvest bananas, make your citizens happy, stage wacky coups. It's all in a day's work for a budding dictator.

Team Fortress 2

Developer **Valve Software**
Publisher **Sierra On-Line**
Release Date **2001**

This may or may not ship in 2001. Where *Half-Life* licensed the *Quake* engine, Valve Software has decided to write an all-new engine this time around. They've also been testing other technologies with various updates to *Half-Life* and its various mods (*Counter-Strike*, *Team Fortress*). The core game is based on the legendary *Quake* mod but slightly expanded. Okay, so it's *really* expanded. Valve is remaining tight-lipped about specifics, but expect many classes of characters (maybe even a commander that can direct troops like a real-time strategy game), full voice-over-net technology, 'bots that turn it into a challenging single-player game and perhaps, just perhaps, it will include the cure for all known diseases.

Star Wars Galaxies Online

Developer **Verant**
Publisher **LucasArts**
Release Date **2001**

Yeah, it won't be out in 2001, but who isn't at least intrigued by what the creators of *EverQuest* and the world's most popular science-fiction series come up with?

WarCraft III

Developer **Blizzard Entertainment**
Publisher **Blizzard Entertainment**
Release Date **Whenever They Want**

How could you not include this game? We covered it in January, and who knows if the folks at Blizzard will actually ship it this year. But for fans of the series, it can't be here soon enough: real-time strategy, role-playing, heroes, terrific graphics... you know the drill.

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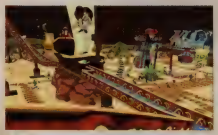

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BEST OF 2001

Shades of GRAY

Peter Molyneux's epic Black & White will expose your morality for the world to see
by Tricia Gray

Great game designers are few and far between, so when the legendary Peter Molyneux, founder of Bullfrog and creator of *Populous* and *Dungeon Keeper*, announced that his latest game *Black & White* was going to be his greatest achievement ever, public anticipation reached a fever pitch. Watching a group of children interacting was one of the things that inspired Molyneux to pursue this particular design, which he indicates will be about one thing: morality. As in the other games he's created, he gives you a "god role," but instead of just creating a world, you have the additional task of implementing your very own belief system.

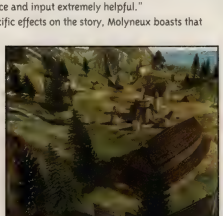
"*Black & White* looks at the way you as an individual play," explains Molyneux, "and it reflects that in its visuals, pace, etc. So my hope is that anyone who plays the game will intuitively know which way they want to progress through the game."

The project began on Valentine's Day in 1998. Molyneux underestimated how long it would take to write the backstory for the game, and hired several Hollywood scriptwriters to hammer it out. The principle advisor was Danny Bilson, co-writer of the movie version of *The Rocketeer* and the TV movie *The Flash*. "In speaking with him," explains Molyneux, "he made us realize that there was a lot more to writing a compelling storyline than we originally imagined particularly in terms of vocabulary and storyline pacing we found his advice and input extremely helpful."

Since even your smallest decisions will have specific effects on the story, Molyneux boasts that one person will never have the same experience as another.

In the Garden of Eden

Eden, the gameworld's version of Earth, is inhabited by a primitive civilization with no belief system. A cry for help results in a magical phenomenon that summons "god" (you) to swiftly save the day. After this miracle, your new disciples take you to the village where you will begin your reign. To navigate through the world, you click and drag yourself around via a virtual hand. An initial half-hour tutorial will help you get used to the movement control and other specifics of the world. Your conscience is your guide, and takes the form of an angel and a devil. They help you understand how to control the game but, more importantly, how to diverge your path toward either good or evil. Sometimes they get a little annoying, but even though you can kill everyone else during gameplay, you can't get rid of your conscience. If you choose the path of good, your world becomes bright and beautiful, but if you choose the path of evil, darkness and decay surround you. Even the hand reflects your decision—the more evil you are, the more gnarled and red it becomes.



A seaside encampment in mid-level development.

The beginning level has elements of a fairly standard real-time strategy game. Initially you need to direct your subjects to build a temple, which will house several important game features. Once the temple is completed, you'll notice different doorways, a scroll listing your accomplishments, the "Challenge Room" (the online multi-player component), and your creature room.

You can then assign your disciples the jobs they'll perform throughout the rest of the

The hand protects Curious George from becoming Tiger Milk.

Restrooms of the main fortress.

game. Lumberjacks cut down trees, carpenters build temples and houses, and harvesters grow and harvest food. Procreation is important and helps spread your religion and build up your civilization, so you must also assign men and women as breeders. You can place couples together, break them apart, or send them separately on their way to plant and spread the seeds of your civilization.

Another way to multiple your population is to perform miracles which will win over non-believers. You do this by "drawing" them with your hand on the screen. The more experience you gain through the game the more miracles you obtain. You'll be able to obtain a maximum of 44 miracles, from growing food and controlling the weather to destroying life with fireballs.

Medium cool

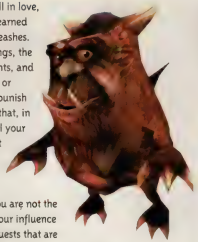
All gods have a medium that represents them in the physical world. Your next task focuses on the selection and the training of your creature. In the first level there are three creatures from which to choose: a tiger, cow, and an ape. Each has its own unique personality; the tiger is strong but aggressive and may take longer to train, the ape is smarter but slower, and the cow has more stamina. During the course of the game the creature will grow physically and develop mentally. As you gain points you can either keep or trade in your creature for one of 16 newer models—it's a bit like leasing a car.

Molyneux describes these characters as "Tamagotchi," simply because you have to train them, pay attention to them, and feed them. Yet, it goes beyond the Tamagotchi realm, the creatures in it are actually more similar to children. For example, you physically show it affection by rubbing it and praising it, or you can abuse the creature by punishing and hitting it. Your behavior towards the creature will also reflect the benevolence or the tyranny of your rule—remember that your creature learns by example. If you constantly destroy or kill your disciples, your creature will do the same, and if you constantly abuse it, it will rebel.

Molyneux wanted his programmers to push the envelope with the AI so the creatures would pass the Turing Test, a personality and intelligence test that no artificial intelligence has ever passed. He even brought the game to MIT to show off the creatures' ability to learn, grow, and understand. When testing one creature's intelligence, Molyneux instructed it to eat only the most nutritious things it could find. When the creature was hungry it ignored all the food supplies and started swatting at its legs. Molyneux, confused about what the creature was trying to convey, observed this behavior until realizing that the creature was trying to eat itself, since it comprised the most nutritious thing in the game. □

Wonder of wonders, miracle of miracles.

The creatures interact with each other, make friends, fall in love, manage the village while you are gone, and many other learned actions. You also control the creature with three types of leashes. There is a normal leash that you use when doing basic things, the fluffy Leash of Compassion for those loving playful moments, and the spiky Leash of Aggression, which is best used in battle or when you want to punish your creature. Learning how to punish and reward the creature is a basic parental responsibility that, in being a good ruler, you must learn to balance. If you spoil your creature it could run around chaotically, and as it grows it will be harder to discipline.



One god

The longer you play, the more you begin to realize that you are not the only god, which is why your main objective is to spread your influence and rule above all others. To do this you must complete quests that are found on 400 scrolls. There are two types of scrolls: Gold and Silver. The Gold Tasks are required to complete the game—for example, finding your creature and building your temple are Gold Scroll quests. Silver Tasks, on the other hand, aren't required, but result in useful rewards.

For instance, one of the first Silver Scroll quests involves a singing trio that begs for help. You can choose to ignore them, kill them, or help them out for a reward. At first they sing for wood. No big deal, you grab some from your stash and help them build the rest of their ship. Then they start singing for more things. Each time you help them they go on and on and on with their singing. After a while, their supplications get very tiresome to the point where you may *want* to kill them. This is Molyneux's way of showing the power of patience. Being good and doing good deeds is a difficult road to walk, but while being evil is easy and takes no effort, you don't get the perks. Remember the rule of Karma; bad actions towards others will come back to you and vice versa with good actions. Characters reappear throughout the game so you never know when you are going to need a reciprocal favor.

More evolution

Multiplayer mode helps speed up creature development in the areas of battle skills, and interaction with others, and you may switch the same creature between modes. So you might want to gain new skills via multiplayer and then apply them in the single-player game. You can also build alliances to defeat other gods but remember, in the immortal words of *Highlander*'s McLeod, "There can be

18 belief points boost the level of your god-ness.

A Game With Character(s)

Peter Molyneux and some artists, testers programmers and producers on the game supplied the following anecdotes of creature behavior from *Black & White*. "We have tried to produce the best AI ever in a game," explains Molyneux, "and I truly believe that everyone who plays this game will end up with a creature and world that is unique to them." Check out these samples:

"Creatures are like people in that they like some creatures love more than others. I have seen creatures sort of fall in love and once I saw my creature wander off hand in hand with his favorite playmate, Ollie's bear, and then sit side-by-side on a cliff to watch the sunset."

"My creature enjoyed playing many games of catch with another Lionhead team member's creature but this may have been because he was better at catch. After a while the other creature was getting fed up, so he placed a rock in the fire so that it got hot and then maneuvered it into my creatures pile of rocks with his feet. My creature picked up the hot rock and badly burnt his hands."

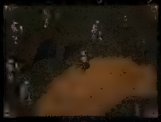
"I taught my creature to eat only Aztec men to prove it was possible. I started with feeding him pigs and praising him, and then I fed him cows and punished him. When we started on people, if he ate women I would punish him but if he ate men I would reward him. Now he will only eat Aztec men."

"My creature was happily engaged in replanting trees on a hillside presumably making himself a cozy den. I decided to help my creature out and planted a tree for him. When he saw me doing this act of what I thought was kindness, he threw the biggest temper tantrum, uprooted his trees one by one and threw them at me... amazing!"

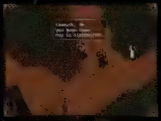
"My creature was trying to attract my attention but I was busy fencing in some cows so I ignored him. I went to get a cup of coffee, came back to my monitor and found that my creature had killed every single cow. I think my creature was experiencing jealousy."

Endless Adventure

Massive Fighting



Player Interaction



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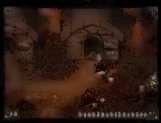

Variety In Career

Last Kingdom is a large-scale fantasy role-playing game with hundreds of monsters, items and a wide variety of magical spells, you can become one of four characters and take their roles in a land of virtual reality. Last Kingdom is enormous and can be explored for hundreds of hours by visiting mystical lands through magical portals. Once you start playing, you will realize just how little you really know about the world of Last Kingdom--and how much there is for you to discover. You can embark even further into the game-playing experience by talking, trading, and exploring with other people over the Internet. Can you save the only kingdom left from the ravaging powers of darkness? We dare you to challenge! Visit **www.netamin.com** <http://www.netamin.com> today to download the game, order the software for free, or check our our software on the CGM disc with this issue.

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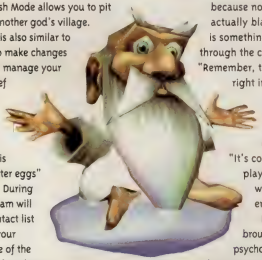
Shades of Armageddon.

Harness the natural elements.

only One." The Skirmish Mode allows you to pit your village against another god's village. This part of the game is also similar to an RTS, as you have to make changes to gain control. You'll manage your disciples to build belief points, and then have your creature cast magic to fight the opposition.

The Lionhead crew is including tons of "Easter eggs" throughout the game. During installation, the program will scan your Outlook contact list and use names from your address book for some of the villagers. If you are online during gameplay, when one of your contacts emails you, the little villager named after him/her will look for you and wave a letter in his/her hand indicating that you have mail.

Even more surreal, as your creature grows it installs a web page on your hard drive and starts to list the things it likes to eat and stuff it likes to do. You can also upload the page to the web. Also, if you are playing music during the game, your creature will recognize it. When you punish your creature while listening to lets say...The Doors. The next time Jim Morrison's voice rings through your speaker or headphones, your creature will get upset and even angry. Maybe you were petting your creature while listening to Beck. He'll add that to his web page and enjoy listening to Beck every time you play his music. (How Pavlovian.) They've added more little delights, but listing everything will ruin the fun.



because nothing created is actually black or white, which is something you'll discover through the choices you make. "Remember, there is no wrong or right in terms of which side—black or white—you chose to play as," explains Molyneux. "It's completely up to the player and what he/she wants to experience".

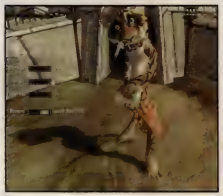
Lionhead actually brought in a team of psychologists to explore the concept of morality, and to relate it to actions that have real-life consequences. You may very well see your own sense of morality more clearly when confronted with an immense decision at the end of the game. Hats off to Molyneux who, in lieu of handing over the big guns to "kill for the win," gives you instead the choice to expose either your inner goodness or inner demons. □

I choose creature number two.

Real-time role-playing

In a nutshell, *Black & White* is a hybrid role-playing and strategy game with an extremely unique twist. With over 60 hours of projected gameplay and, in theory, endless replay value both on and offline due to its customizable nature, and its original use of adaptation and behavioral feedback, it could possibly be one of the most fascinating games of the year.

More importantly, a game like *Black & White* might mollify the constant attacks on the immorality and irresponsibility of the gaming industry. The title itself is a misnomer



The nature of your creature interaction will determine its development.

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Maybe it's a good thing

by Jason Cross

The biggest news in the hardware world last month was the NVIDIA buyout of 3dfx. It wasn't actually a buyout, but that's the way it has been portrayed. NVIDIA didn't buy 3dfx. 3dfx ran out of money, ran out of credit, and things got so bad their only way out was to sell off everything they could and close up shop. NVIDIA bought all the 3dfx assets worth anything: its patent portfolio (past and pending), intellectual property, brand names, and existing chip stock.

It didn't buy the 3dfx board manufacturing business—who would? It sure hasn't been turning a profit for 3dfx, and NVIDIA is perfectly happy remaining a chip-seller. The company also made job offers to over 100 3dfx employees, and I understand most have been accepted.

Gamers everywhere, especially the hardcore 3dfx zealots, have been lamenting the pending death of 3dfx. They still swear that the Voodoo5 is the greatest thing ever, 3dfx is the greatest video company ever, and the upcoming product (code-named Rampage) would have kicked the snot out of the competition. You should hear fans talk about Fear, a project that wasn't due for release until maybe the end of 2001.

It's easy to look at 3dfx on its deathbed and talk about its potential. It's convenient—you get to ignore little nagging issues like actually shipping a working product, quality drivers, developer support... I've given the situation a lot of thought, and I'm going to go out on a limb and say, "it's a good thing." That's right, I think 3dfx closing up shop and selling the farm to NVIDIA is good.

Now those who know me, or read these pages carefully, know I'm a pretty vendor-neutral hardware geek. I want better products with more features, better support, and more stability. Beyond that, I don't care where they come from, and I'd gladly yank out my GeForce2 and replace it with something from ATI or Matrox if it was better. So I'm not one of those NVIDIA worshippers who dances around my apartment singing "ding dong the witch is dead" now that 3dfx is going away (If you spend any time reading message boards online, you know who these people are). You'll get no argument from me about 3dfx's contribution to 3D graphics on the PC. They started it all, they popularized it. 3dfx wasn't the first with 3D, but they were the ones to show the world that affordable 3D could really be great. They made it a must-have technology.

But then what? The Voodoo2 was good, but the Banshee underwhelmed and by the time Voodoo3 came around, 3dfx was woefully behind on important features. Voodoo5 came half a year later than expected, and though it's not bad, it's bulky, has flaky driver problems, and is missing important DirectX 7 features. It didn't matter as much when the cards were released, but now it just doesn't have the legs more full-featured cards like the GeForce2 and Radeon have. Better anti-aliasing is nice, but it's not enough.

Plain and simple, 3dfx was making great noise, but they weren't making great product. It was falling behind and bleeding money like a dot-com venture capital firm. Products were popular at retail and among the 3dfx loyalists, but both are small potatoes. Cards from NVIDIA and ATI were finding their way into far more PCs thanks to OEM sales. Developers go where the cards are, and developers have been making games with NVIDIA cards in their machines.

What do we lose with 3dfx's demise? Obviously the company had talented engineering, and we'll never get to see Rampage. Whatever pressure 3dfx put on ATI and NVIDIA to add features or deliver product sooner is now gone. But I contest that that pressure was weaker than the low-flow shower faucet at your local Super-8 Motel. ATI and NVIDIA are gunning for each other now, and when 3dfx's last few products had fewer features *and* weren't delivered on time, well that's not really competitive.

What we gain is consolidation, and the PC world could use a little. The fragmented video card market is one of the reasons PC games are buggy and time consuming to develop. It's why developers have a hard time tracking down problems with their products. With 3dfx out of the way, developers have fewer variants to worry about, and hopefully everything gets a little more stable.

Some say that prices on NVIDIA's products are going to go way up now that 3dfx isn't there to provide competition. That's bull. To begin with, there are a dozen vendors selling NVIDIA based products—that's pretty good competition for not overpricing boards. ATI has sold more PC graphics components than anyone else for years now; they have been and still are the most serious pricing competition for NVIDIA. If prices on NVIDIA's new products is high, it's going to be due to expensive high-speed RAM and 50 million transistor chips used, not because 3dfx isn't there to provide price pressure.

Sure, I'm somewhat sad to see a company disappear when it was so influential. At least 3dfx's technology is now in the hands of a company that has demonstrated that it can bring it to market and turn a profit. In a funny way, we have a better chance of putting 3dfx technology in our computers now that it's in NVIDIA's hands than we had *before*. 3dfx is dead, long live 3dfx.

Q: I'm sort of hearing the Pentium 4 motherboards won't accommodate the Voodoo 5500. What's up with that?

Christopher H.

A: You're hearing the truth. 3dfx's page explains the situation like this:

Voodoo3/4/5 products are compatible with AGP 1x, 2x, and 4x universal connectors. They are fully compatible with all AMD® and Intel processors, including Intel's new Pentium 4. However, our current boards are not compatible with AGP 1.5 Volt ONLY connectors. This connector provides 1.5 Volt signaling to the socket and is physically keyed differently to prevent other AGP boards that required 3.3 Volt signaling from being plugged into the AGP 1.5 Volt only sockets. Unfortunately, the core logic chip for Intel's Pentium 4 does not support 3.3 Volt signaling on the AGP Bus.

The Voodoo4 4500 features a universal PCB and is compatible with all Pentium 4 motherboards. The Voodoo3 product family and the Voodoo5 5500 boards feature a 3.3 Volt only PCB and in most cases will not fit in the new Pentium 4 motherboards. 3dfx does not advise the purchase of either Voodoo3 or Voodoo5 products for Pentium 4 systems.

So there you have it. The current Pentium 4 motherboards won't work with Voodoo3 and Voodoo5 cards, but Voodoo4 cards work fine.

Q: Do you know where I can find the latest Vortex2 drivers? Aureal's site no longer has them.

Peter S.

A: Now that Aureal is out of business, you're not going to be able to find drivers for their Vortex2 series of sound cards at their site. If you have a sound card that uses the AU8830 or AU8820 chips (Vortex 2 or Vortex 1) you can find drivers at an Aureal fan site Vortex of Sound: www.vortexofsound.com.

Q: I was wondering if CPU speed will make up for a 3D card? I recently bought a Pentium III 800 with an average 3D card (ATI Expert 2000 32Mb AGP) and was wondering if if would run 3D accelerated games as well as say, a PIII 667 with GeForce2 MX (or even a regular GeForce)?

Jeffrey J.

A: An ATI Expert 2000 is a pretty low-end video card for a new system these days. Really, a fast CPU doesn't make up for a slow 3D card, because they don't do the same things. Now, each game has different requirements for video card speed and CPU speed, so you can't say that a Pentium III at 667 MHz with a GeForce would always be faster than your machine. It would almost certainly run *Quake III* faster, and in fact a better video card than yours would improve most high-end 3D games. But a game like *The Sims*, many strategy games, and some flight simulators might be more CPU-hungry than video-card-hungry.

In general, it's safe to say that your 800 MHz machine is somewhat hamstringed by a slow video card for most 3D games, while a 667 Mhz machine with a GeForce would be more evenly matched, and would often run games faster.

Q: I wonder if one could modify the hardware testing a bit? It would be nice to see the results on flight sims, especially Falcon 4 and Jane's F/A18 Hornet — both very taxing on both CPU and graphic accelerators.

Tomas

A: I hear what you're saying loud and clear. Unfortunately, it's not as easy to implement as it seems. There are two problems with testing flight sims these days:

1. In order to use a game as a benchmark, it needs to have a method of repeating the *exact* same test over and over, delivering a final result in frames per second or some other meaningful metric. Most flight sims can give you a frame-rate counter or even give you an average FPS, but they don't have a way to recreate that exact same flight with the exact same viewpoint over and over. Without this, it's possible that one test might be faster or slower simply because it didn't attempt to show exactly the same thing. I'm aware of a way to do this with *Falcon 4.0*, but it's a bit of a kludge.

2. As you said, Flight Sims tax the CPU as much, or even more than, the graphics card. This is fine if you're just reviewing CPUs, but over the course of a year the vast majority of products reviewed that need benchmarks are video cards. You don't want your benchmarks to be limited by CPU speed because then two different video cards might appear to be the same speed when really they're not. For instance, if you get 42 frames per second in *Falcon 4.0* on both a TNT2 Ultra and a GeForce 2 because 42 FPS is all your CPU can handle in that game, it doesn't really tell you that a GeForce2 is 3 or 4 times as fast as the TNT2 Ultra.

Beyond those reasons, benchmarks are often chosen for the popularity of the game engine—*Quake 3* and *Unreal Tournament* are good benchmarks because the engines that power those games are licensed and used in a dozen games a year. When you know how a piece of hardware performs in *Quake 3*, you get a good idea of it's relative performance in *FAKK2*, *Elite Force*, *Alice*, *Return to Wolfenstein*, etc. Flight Sims rarely license out their engines and so a benchmark on those only tells you how well that hardware performs on that one game.

I'm always looking for really good test applications that are:

a) accurately reproduceable
b) relevant to many games
c) able to tax even the fastest video cards

So if you come across games that meet those criteria, I'd be happy to take a look and consider them when I change my benchmarks. It's getting harder and harder to find good ones that give readers the best info without resorting to running benchmarks for 12 different products—which can be confusing.

Q: When adding a website to my list of Favorites in Internet Explorer, occasionally the Favorite is denoted in the list with a custom icon instead of the usual small page with the lower case blue "e." What causes this to happen, and more importantly, why do these custom icons randomly seem to disappear after a period of time to be replaced by the generic page icon mentioned above?

Scott W.

A: Those little icons, called Favicons, are a new feature of Internet Explorer where a site designer can specify an image to use as a little icon in the favorites list (or to appear if you make a shortcut to that web page on your desktop or start menu or something). So those little icons appear because the guys who made that website you're bookmarking decided they want a little icon to represent their site. As for why they disappear on you—that I can't say. They're not supposed to do that. The icon files are cached like other web data, so the images might just be expiring from your cache. For more info, check out www.favicon.com.

Q: A long time ago you ran an article about getting the best performance out of your existing PC, optimizing memory usage, etc. I was wondering if you could either re-run the article or compile a optimization guide for readers to use.

Brendan F.

A: The article you're referring to was "Tuning Windows for Games," and it turned out to be quite popular. It appeared in the May issue of the magazine, issue 114, and was posted online in the middle of February. This article generated a ton of response, most quite positive, so we think it should be a yearly feature. The plan is to do an updated version this spring, and the article should appear in the June or July issue. So, gentle readers, if there are any features missing from the first guide you'd like to see in the updated version this year, let us know by sending an email to qa@cdmag.com.

Q: I have a FF-back Wheel and Joystick. At present they connect through the PCI soundcard port on my 233MHz Pentium. What worries me is that new computers now seem to have USB connections. Does this mean my controllers are junk if I upgrade to a new machine, or will future computers still offer this type of connection?

Carl S.

A: You should be just fine with a new computer. The joystick port hasn't really gone anywhere—true, you can find *some* computers that don't have one, but the vast majority still do. Nearly every modern sound card includes a standard joystick port, and even most motherboards with built-in sound include one. If by some odd chance you happen to get a computer with no joystick port, you can buy an add-in PCI card with a joystick port pretty cheaply. It would certainly cost less than replacing your current force feedback controllers with new USB models. ■

SoundMan Xtrusio DSR-100

Finally a SoundMan worth buying

Logitech's speakers to date haven't been particularly impressive. While the prices and designs are okay, they've not delivered enough high-end sound quality satisfies serious audiophile gamers. The Xtrusio DSR-100 starts to change all that. With it, Logitech finally takes the SoundMan line to a quality level a serious gamer can be proud of.

Open the box of the 4.1 speaker system and you'll likely be a bit surprised. The sparse, almost embarrassingly scant setup instructions are par for the course with PC speakers, so no surprise there. What's unusual is the bundled software; the Xtrusio comes with PowerDVD and a CD full of Internet music shareware labeled "soundmobile.com." You probably won't find the soundmobile.com CD that appealing, but a free copy of PowerDVD is always nice.

The subwoofer includes both analog front and rear speaker connections and a digital coaxial input for those with sound cards that have digital outputs. If both are connected, a signal from the digital input will override the analog. From the back of the subwoofer, where you connect your input sources, you also connect the four satellites and the control unit that sits on top of your desk. The control unit is rather nice—it includes a power switch and headphone jack along with volume and front/rear fader knobs. It's easy to precisely control the volume and fade with your fingertips, and the headphone jack is a breath of fresh air not often seen on four-channel speaker systems.

Four sleek satellites and a subwoofer. The volume/fader remote is not pictured.

Sound quality is quite good. The subwoofer is 52 watts and powerful enough to fill in the bottom end well, though it doesn't quite have enough "kick." The four 12-watt satellites do an admirable job with mid and high-range tones, though. It's not the best sounding 4.1 system (an honor that still goes to Klipsch's ProMedia set), but for $179 it's really pretty good, and the control unit with headphone jack is nice. —*Jason Cross*

THE GOODS

MANUFACTURER Logitech

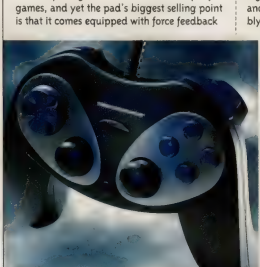
MSRP $179

RATING ★★★★☆

FireStorm Dual Power Gamepad

Bigger isn't necessarily better

Thrustmaster's FireStorm Dual Power USB Gamepad is caught between a rock and a brick wall. Gamepads are generally used for arcade sports games and action-based platform games, and yet the pad's biggest selling point is that it comes equipped with force feedback technology, something that is rarely supported in today's sports games. Pile that on top of the fact that the software provided with the pad is highly unstable, making it difficult to program, and you are stuck with a controller that is terribly difficult to recommend.



This is one large gamepad. There are two additional buttons located underneath the base.

Another problem with the controller is its size. It's huge. It's a few centimeters wider than a standard Microsoft Sidewinder, and the buttons are more spread out, making them difficult to reach. The pad comes equipped with a wide array of buttons, 13 in all—four on its face, four on its front, two underneath the base, two analog controllers, and a start button.

Playing sports games such as *High Heat Baseball* or *NHL 2001* is a real chore. If you are used to using a Sidewinder, for example, you will be greeted with a new button layout once inside the game; this forces you to either get used to the new configuration or attempt to reprogram the button layout with the pad's Thrustmapper software. It looks easy enough—you can program each button and save individual game presets. The only problem is that the software is prone to crashing. Even when the software does work as advertised, the pad will (at times) either ignore your new configurations or simply fail to respond once you are back playing the game. There's no rhyme or reason to it; *FIFA 2001* worked perfectly while *NHL 2001* refused to work at all with a new configuration set.

On a positive note, playing a game such as *Need For Speed: High Stakes* with force feedback activated is a pleasure; the analog controllers work quite well and are very responsive. Even so, the effects are more rumble-like, which lessens the impact that you get with a true force feedback stick or wheel. It's very similar to a PlayStation pad in this regard.

Even though the price is a competitive at 30 bucks, it's hard to recommend the pad for anyone other than arcade racing fans that do not already own a wheel setup. If you are a sports gamer, you are much better off sticking with the Gravis Eliminator Gamepad Pro or the original Microsoft Sidewinder. —*William Abner*

THE GOODS

MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster

MSRP $29.95

RATING ★★☆☆☆

www.cdmag.com

Serious Gamers.
Serious Fun.

UPSIDE

Sets a new standard for graphic excellence in a combat flight simulation, dynamic method of changing from computer to human control creates a lot of freedom to play in different ways

DOWNSIDE

Lack of multiplayer is a sin, teething problems will require extensive patching, steep system requirements

[left to right] A crewman delivers first aid and a shot of reality.

The hunter becomes the hunted... then the vanquished.

B-17 Flying Fortress: The Mighty 8th

Hasbro's serious bomber simulation is as flawed as it is good

THOUGH THERE IS STILL SOME CONTROVERSY SURrounding the effectiveness of daylight bombing during WWII, there is one thing of which there is little doubt: bombing in daylight over German occupied territory was extremely hazardous. The planes were relatively slow, maximizing the stay over the target, and the gauntlet of enemy fighters and flak that had to be run was murderous.

One thing you will notice right away as you play Hasbro's latest combat flight simulation, *B-17 Flying Fortress: The Mighty 8th*, is that the men who flew these huge, ungainly instruments of destruction were brave beyond belief. Unfortunately, it appears Hasbro elected to ship this game before it was ready as some promised features are missing from the version on store shelves.

Mean looks, mean requirements

The B-17 is one of the most recognizable aircraft from the last world war, and it also has one of the meanest looks of any bomber ever built. It bristles with gun turrets, and its pilot cockpit glares out at the enemy with black eyes under a Neanderthal brow. It screams, "we're mad as hell, Hitler, and we're not going to take it anymore!" This look was the epitome of American resolve, and it's fully captured in what are probably the most beautiful and complete graphics in any flight simulation ever. Even the ground is noteworthy with its patchwork of green farms, detailed cities, white-capped ocean waves, and numerous rivers.

The exterior view of a group of bombers in formation is an awesome sight. The planes all drift slightly on the air currents while faint contrails trace behind. When AA guns are within range, the flak starts exploding all around the planes. Each explosion flashes, blooms, and contracts as the bomber formation passes through. When flak is especially heavy the effect is absolutely amazing. As combat damage accumulates, the planes develop holes that you can see through, scars on the aluminum panels, seized-up propellers, and oily smoke ribbons extending from the back of an engine. When a plane is unlucky enough to take a direct AA hit or to get pounced on by several fighters at once, it can disintegrate and pinwheel to the ground in a shower of fragments. You'll swear that you're watching genuine war footage shot by a combat correspondent—the overall effect is that good.

Beyond the external views, there are the internal views of the bombers and crew. The crewmen are somewhat blocky, but you can see them move about the plane, dodging other crewmembers and sidestepping through narrow areas. They will shake injured crewmen as they apply first aid while shouting, "get a hold of yourself!" All the stations are meticulously modeled: radio, navigation, cockpit, bomb bay, gun turrets, even the bombs themselves sit ominously in their racks.

This excellent graphical detail does not come without a price, however. Only the most powerful systems with large amounts of memory (more than the 128 MB listed on the game box, certainly) can even attempt to run the game with all graphic options turned on and at the highest res-

Death can come suddenly for some.

THE GOODS

GENRE Simulation

PUBLISHER Hasbro Interactive

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 300, 128 MB RAM, 3D Accelerator

MULTIPLAYER None

RATING ★★★★☆

TEEN T ESRB

Only nerves of steel will get you through the heavy flak.

The sweet smell of success... or was that cordite.

olutions. Flight simulation fan sites are crowded with messages about problems getting the graphics to work and complaints about frame rate. Hasbro and Microprose have definitely created a game that challenges even the most current hardware.

There's no "I" in "team"

You can play *B-17* in one of several ways. There are historical and training missions that encompass many common situations. There are typical bombing raids, a take-off exercise, bombardier training, and even an emergency landing. The campaign is the real heart of the game, however.

You can play as a squadron commander or a bomber commander. As a squadron commander, you command a flight of bombers, pick out targets for the next mission, and schedule reconnaissance flights. Managing manpower and bomber resources is key to being successful as a squadron commander. As a bomber commander, your task is to stay with the same bomber throughout a 25-mission campaign. Considering the attrition rate, that is a very challenging proposal. You get to pick your bomber group, squadron, nose art, and your crew.

You also have to manage the crew during a mission. Keeping their morale and skills high while protecting their lives is one of the great challenges of the game, and is accomplished by assigning them to different stations to give them diverse experience and by moving them around during a mission. If a crewman becomes especially demoralized, you can assign him to ground duty for some needed rest. You can actively control any of the stations in the lead plane, and doing so is a fairly simple affair. From every gun position, to the navigator's chair, to the cockpit, you can play a career as just one crewmember, or play all of them in turn over the course of one mission.

The real magic comes into play when you leave a position and the computer takes over using the skills of the crewman normally stationed in that position. This perfect combination of completeness and simplicity should appeal to the simulation "old guard" as well as the green recruit. Beyond manning the normal positions, each crewmember can also perform first aid, make repairs, extinguish fires, and (when all hope is gone) bail out.

"We've been hit!"

B-17 has raised the bar in terms of damage modeling as well. Hits are modeled in very specific ways that have a great impact on aircraft handling and crew health. Your plane can actually be hit in the tire resulting in a bullet-riddled flat that will greatly affect your landing, for instance. Broken windows, see-through tail sections, and smoking engines are evident in virtually every mission.

The flight model has some drawbacks but also includes some stunning details. Put the aircraft through an aerobatics trial and it will pull off some impressive maneuvers that might not be expected from a B-17—especially one loaded with fuel and bombs. There is not a lot of reason to do this in a real mission, though—the doctrine of the day dictated remaining in the box formation to maximize interlocking fields of fire from the machine gun turrets.

Purists may be annoyed with the somewhat forgiving model, but will probably be pleased by the plane's reaction to a damaged engine. When an engine seizes up, it becomes a source of drag and the engines on the other wing create an asymmetric thrust about the yaw axis. This can be partly compensated for with the rudder, but also requires some roll applied through the ailerons to counteract the damaged aircraft's tendency to turn from the desired course. It's a nice bit of detail.

Speaking of details, the number of keyboard controls for this simulation exceeds 130 separate single and multi-key combinations. Again the design appeals to hardcore and newbie alike—you can go through the 30-odd steps to start the engines, including setting manifold pressures and the like, or you can just hit the time-skip key and find yourself in the air and in formation. There are also 12 different trim controls to adjust heading, 8 landing gear controls, and 8 brake controls. Remember keyboard templates? This game could use one.

Rush job?

Unfortunately, the manual is extremely small and unwieldy with very sparse descriptions of some of the more important procedures. The game also suffers from numerous crashes and random bugs. One such bug popped up at the end of a mission; the computer-controlled aircraft rear-ended another plane while taxiing, causing both to explode in a cloud of flames. Bet you never read about that in history class. Sound can also fade for no apparent reason, joystick key mappings don't seem to work correctly, and crewmen can inexplicably disappear from their positions.

The most incomprehensible issue is the lack of multiplayer support. It is interesting that Hasbro found the resources to include multiplayer support in the computer version of *Battleship* while omitting it in a game that literally begs for a human, network-connected crew. Technically difficult? Maybe, but *Longbow 2* got it to work over three years ago. You'll have to imagine what it would have been like to have your online buddies man all positions while others tried to shoot you down. Also missing in action are force feedback support, careers for fighter pilots (you can jump into fighters), and a way to turn of the sometimes-annoying subtitles.

Even with the rough edges, it's still an awesome single player game. The variety of working crew positions and the ability to adjust the difficulty by changing positions makes each mission a unique adventure into a time when heroes were made. —*Brett Berger*

That can of "fix-a-flat" in the glove box won't help this.

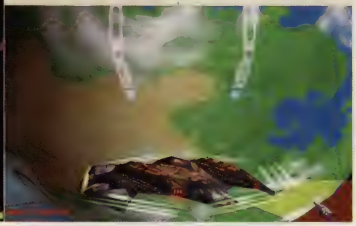
"Captain's log, stardate 2404.3. For no discernable reason, my ship blew up. They just don't make 'em like they used to."

UPSIDE

Gorgeous graphics, new races, enhanced controls, better campaigns

DOWNSIDE

Bugs, bugs, and more bugs, no multiplayer Dynaverse, and poor campaign balancing



A beautifully detailed ISC command cruiser defends its homeworld.

Starfleet Command Volume II

Interplay delivers 5 stars of potential in a 3.5 star package

Ah, the joys of the Christmas retail season. While most folk don't have to contend with anything more frustrating than wall-to-wall crowds and endless orbits around mall parking lots, game developers face tremendous pressure from their publishers to get product on the store shelves in time for a holiday sales boost. The quest for this Holy Grail of game marketing has prematurely unleashed a host of buggy games on an unsuspecting buying public. Sadly, *Starfleet Command Volume II: Empires at War* seems to be such a game. The original *Starfleet Command* was one of the most welcome gaming surprises of 1999, a rich, gorgeous, and fun space combat simulator that deservedly attracted a respectable helping of critical acclaim. The sequel has obvious potential, but a long list of problems and missing features hamstring what might otherwise have been a classic game.

THE GOODS

GENRE Starship Simulation

PUBLISHER Interplay

REQUIREMENTS Pentium III 350, 64 MB RAM, 3D Accelerator

MULTIPLAYER 2-8 players; Internet, LAN, serial connection

RATING ★★★½☆

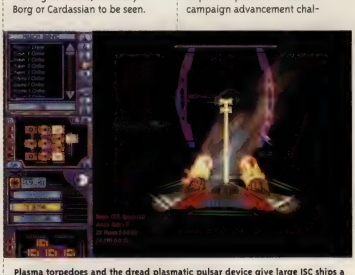
ESRB E EVERYONE

New graphics, new controls, new races

Like its predecessor, *Starfleet Command II* is loosely based on the classic *Starfleet Battles* board game, with a real-time twist on the original turn-based mechanics. It does a magnificent job capturing the style of combat featured in the *Star Trek* films, where graceful starships glide majestically through space making ponderous turns and exchanging lethal volleys of weapons fire. The game's immersive graphics are a significant step up from those of the original game. Ship models are smoother and more detailed, dynamic lighting and damage texturing make their first appearance in the series, weapons (especially disrupters) look more menacing, and the planets, starbases, and nebulas are superb.

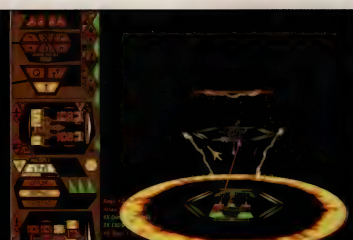
Starfleet Command veterans will find few changes in the sequel's interface or in the game engine, although some valuable refinements have been added. A new system of "priority toggles" ensures that the most important ship systems have first dibs on your limited energy supplies. The fleet panel enables superior control of multi-ship taskforces, allowing you to choose formations, determine how much independence your subordinate officers display, and whether they should capture or destroy your target. Better still, allied and enemy AI has been greatly improved. Computer controlled ships protect collapsed shields from further attacks and no longer rely upon point-blank firing passes as their only battle tactic. Finally, the campaign game—when it works—offers a much better selection of missions appropriate to your location in the galaxy than the original game, and your actions as a commander make a real difference to the fortunes of your race.

Despite endless requests from fans of *Star Trek Voyager, Deep Space 9,* and the *Next Generation, Starfleet Command II* remains firmly set in the Trek universe of the original series, with nary a Borg or Cardassian to be seen. Instead, two new races from the board game join the original six empires. The Mirak, a bloodthirsty race of feline warriors, fly ships armed with phasers, missiles, and disrupters (much like the Klingons). However, the Mirak place a much heavier emphasis on missile use than any other race in the galaxy. Unlike most weapons, missiles don't require power to fire, which gives them a decided advantage. They also require ammo, however, and you must purchase reloads with the prestige earned from successful missions... the same prestige that is also used to pay for repairs and buy new ships. This poses some serious campaign advancement chal-



Plasma torpedoes and the dread plasmatic pulsar device give large ISC ships a lethal punch.

If you play a campaign game, be prepared to stare at this screen a lot.



The Lyran expanding sphere generator is a great defense against Mirak missiles.

lenges for the Mirak (and, to a lesser degree, the Federation and Klingons, who also use missiles).

In that regard, *Starfleet Command II's* prestige reward system is terribly unbalanced. Each mission type awards the same amount of prestige to the victor regardless of the class of ships involved. Large Mirak fleets often face equally powerful foes, and therefore have to launch every possible missile to win. The prestige cost of replacing that ammo can be more than the total award for winning the battle, which renders the Mirak unplayable in short order. The same problem also affects carrier groups. The game offers every race an interesting selection of carrier-launched fighters or fast patrol ships that pack a significant wallop in battle, but they are very easy to destroy and too costly to replace.

The other new race, the ISC, is a galactic superpower bent on enforcing peace through superior firepower. Its strong ships are armed with phasers, plasma torpedoes, and the feared plasmatic pulsar device, probably the best long-range weapon in the game. Capable of reaching out and touching someone hard at a range of 150,000 km or better, the PPD quickly strips enemies of their shields and weapons. Since you won't have to spend prestige to maintain your weapons (they don't burn ammo), the ISC is a much more viable race than are the Mirak.

"Fascinating, Captain. We seem to be surrounded by bugs"

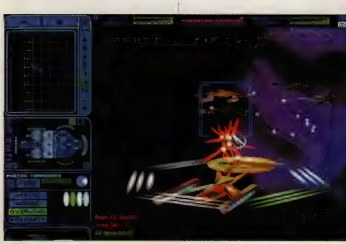
Despite a patch that was released almost simultaneously with the game, *Starfleet Command II* is still infected with a vast horde of bugs. Many of the weapon systems hit for incorrect damage at certain ranges or don't fire as often as they should. When employed at close range, some heavy weapons fail to inflict feedback damage on the firing ship. Tractor beams and the Romulan cloaking device both function incorrectly. Starbases fail to fire their mighty phaser IV's on stationary targets, making the capture of these fortresses much easier than it should be.

One of the most irritating bugs only appears partway through campaign games. As the saved game files get older and larger, the speed of the game slows dramatically. Eventually, it can take minutes just to load the game or move from one map sector to another, and repairs become a time-consuming nightmare. Most players faced with this problem just give up on their campaigns and start over, only to face the same bug again a few missions later. Another annoying problem is the instant death bug—occasionally one or more of your ships will spontaneously self-destruct at the very beginning of a battle. You can always reload, but if you're suffering from the campaign slowdown bug that's not a particularly appealing prospect.

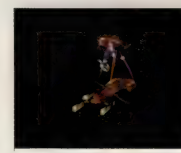
Two significant problems—one bug and one serious design flaw—come straight from *Starfleet Command*. Their reappearance in the sequel is inexcusably sloppy. First, any fighters or shuttles not docked with their carrier at the end of a mission are lost forever. Since fighters provide most of the offense for carrier groups, they are almost always deployed at mission end. The resulting loss of prestige makes carrier groups unplayable in campaign settings. The design flaw, "stripping," affects multiplayer games. Players can select ships far more powerful than the game's selected point limit and then strip them of mines, marines, and spare parts to make them cheap enough to use. When you encounter a stripped battleship in your legitimate light cruiser, it's game over.

Where is the Dynaverse?

The worst problem of all is that the much-anticipated multiplayer Dynaverse, which promises players the opportunity to fight in grand scale campaigns against literally thousands of other commanders, doesn't exist. Flipside.com, the firm that was allegedly supposed to host the Dynaverse, pulled out of their agreement with Interplay just prior to release. Interplay has graciously volunteered to take over the hosting, but the server code is nowhere near ready. The (very brief) open testing that ran for a couple weeks demonstrated an inability to handle more than a dozen players at once, froze constantly, and failed to generate missions. The *Starfleet Command II* staff hasn't posted any information on an expected release date for a functioning Dynaverse, and the fan community has no choice but to continue waiting impatiently.



Glowing photon torpedoes and missiles illuminate the game's dynamic lighting.



A Mirak cruiser's missiles overwhelm a Klingon's defenses.

The game that could have been

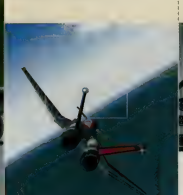
Regardless of the politics that govern when a publisher releases a game, *Starfleet Command II* is clearly not ready for prime time. Abundant bugs, unbalanced campaign prestige, and a non-functional multiplayer campaign all mar an otherwise classic game. The new features that do function add a lot to the game; will Interplay and Taldren reveal this game's untapped potential in future patches? It's impossible to say. For now you'll have to settle for glimpses of what might have been. —*Dave Markell*

UPSIDE

Diverse number of flyable aircraft, great flight modeling

DOWNSIDE

Steep learning curve, tries to do too much, scenery is fairly uninteresting



[left to right] I'll take Manhattan... but that doesn't look much like Manhattan!

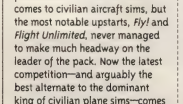
This sci-fi style aircraft was once owned by the X-Men.

"Peggy Sue, Peggy Sue" Is this how Buddy Holly felt?

X-Plane

X marks the spot

There are some franchises that simply dominate their respective markets. In the realm of computer gaming, the king of flight sim franchises is *Microsoft Flight Simulator*. There have been pretenders to the throne when it comes to civilian aircraft sims, but the most notable upstarts, *Fly!* and *Flight Unlimited*, never managed to make much headway on the leader of the pack. Now the latest competition—and arguably the best alternate to the dominant king of civilian plane sims—comes from a small developer that initially designed software for testing aircraft designs.



The City of Angles lights up the dusk sky.

THE GOODS

GENRE Flight Simulation

PUBLISHER Xicat Interactive, Ltd.

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 300, 32 MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER None

RATING ★★½☆☆

ESRB E EVERYONE

Developed by Laminar Research, Inc., *X-Plane* crossed over into the mainstream game market last year and was originally only available online before the company reached a publishing deal with Xicat Interactive. As a result, this title has garnered quite a following through word of mouth while skipping the mass-market radar screens completely. Like many small projects that grow through word of mouth efforts, the game has also garnered a vast amount of grassroots hype and inflated expectations.

For what it is worth, *X-Plane* is not a bad game. In fact, it is actually a truly remarkable simulation and it has a lot going for it. Unfortunately it faces the inevitable comparisons with *Microsoft Flight Simulator*, and while it holds its own on many levels, this title lacks a lot of the spit and polish that comes with a large development team and some of the beefiest marketing muscle in the industry. It is difficult to do everything well, and the Laminar Research seems to set their focus a bit too wide with *X-Plane*. The game does one thing well (flight modeling) and everything else adequately, and in the end the experience is a bit less compelling than it could have been.

The game offers a vast number of aircraft—more than most of the other civilian sims on the market. *X-Plane* features more than 30 unique aircraft, including light craft, military fighters, supersonic planes, commercial jets, even helicopters and spacecraft. You can fly everything from a B2 Stealth Bomber or 747 to a Harrier Jump Jet or a Cessna. The flight models are absolutely outstanding—each of the planes reacts believably, and this game clearly demonstrates how challenging it can be to fly some of these craft. The military aircraft are much more difficult to fly than many of their civilian counterparts, of course, offering additional challenge when you grow tired of hopping around in your Cessna. Considering the number of planes available, expect to log a lot of airtime before you have exhausted this game's potential.

Like its Microsoft counterpart, the game focuses on the joy of flying. There is no combat option, even for the various fighter planes, so if you are looking for a combat sim you will have to look somewhere else. The game includes a plane and part maker so that you can create and fly your own aircraft and even post them online. Using the plane and part maker takes a lot of practice, a whole lot of time, and a fair amount of patience. Considering the end results, however, it's an excellent feature and one that should really extend the life of this title.

While the game's vast collection of aircraft can be quite aesthetically pleasing, don't expect too much in terms of terrain. *X-Plane* features mostly generic settings, so whether you are over Los Angeles or New York, London or Omaha, everything on the ground looks pretty much the same. Even the airports have a generic look. This is perhaps the game's biggest flaw. Looking at the scenery is a large portion of the appeal in a civilian flight sim; when the entire focus of the game is flying from one place to the next, it's nice when the "next" doesn't look pretty much the same as the "one place."

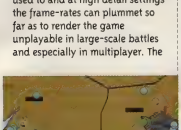
Visually the game is also a mixed bag; the landmasses, water and clouds are quite realistic but the ground becomes somewhat blocky at low altitudes. The textures for the aircraft also look good, but you'll see much better rendering in *Fly!* or *Flight Simulator*.

X-Plane is also not the easiest simulation on the market; the learning curve is extremely steep, so if you decide to take the pilot's seat, be prepared for a bit of a bumpy ride. It's exactly the sort of title you would expect from a small, grassroots developer—made with obvious enthusiasm but lacking a lot of the polish of its market-dominating competitor. —*Peter Suciu*

Battle of Britain

Schizophrenia in the skies over England

Battle of Britain is arguably two separate games—a flight simulator and a strategy game—and each part is at times brilliant and at times frustrating. As a simulator, it has solid graphics and gameplay, but the flight model requires more than a little getting used to and at high detail settings the frame-rates can plummet so far as to render the game unplayable in large-scale battles and especially in multiplayer. The campaign mode has enough depth that it could almost stand alone as a strategy game, but the learning curve is quite steep if you want to make the leap from oblivious participant to strategic mastermind. The significant time investment required to master *Battle of Britain* is not without payoff—in its impressive scale in the air and on the strategic map, it succeeds in evoking a sense of history and drama that no previous flight simulator has ever quite matched.



The Campaign Map.

Battle of Britain is set in the summer of 1940 and focuses on the Germans' efforts to achieve air superiority over England in preparation for an invasion. You do your part in the struggle from the cockpit of the Spitfire and Hurricane on the British side, or in the Messerschmidt 109 and 110 and Junkers 87 dive-bomber on the German side. You can also to serve as gunner in the German medium bombers—the Heinkel 111, the Dornier 17, and the Junkers 88—in the game's campaign mode.

Battle of Britain distinguishes itself with scale. From the campaign map you can direct thousands of aircraft at a time, and in the simulation you can participate in engagements that include literally hundreds of other aircraft. The game really pulls off the atmosphere of large-scale air battles well, although it can come with a distinct performance trade off. The graphics are good on the whole, though by no means overwhelming, and the game sound and radio chatter are solid.

The flight model is a story of extremes. At low realism settings, the fighters are very forgiving; at the high setting they are so jittery that flying (not to mention dog-fighting) is almost impossible. With a lot of settings manipulation, including joystick and force feedback tweaking, you can get control, but you might find yourself sticking to the novice flight model settings to have fun. The enemy AI ranges from catatonic to superb, and if it is set on high, you will be rewarded with challenging opponents that employ excellent—and difficult to follow—historical maneuvers.

The campaign takes place on a strategic map of England and the German airfields across the Channel. Playing as the Luftwaffe, you plan raids on English airfields, radar towers, factories, conveys, and other industrial targets to try to bring the RAF to its knees, and as the RAF, you assign patrols and scramble fighters to counter real and perceived Luftwaffe threats. You have an extremely wide array of options and information available to you in mission planning—indeed, many more than are adequately covered in the documentation—and the campaign depth is impressive. Basic mission planning can be done for you but is not especially interesting, yet planning your own missions can be extremely cumbersome.

Battle of Britain might be regarded as a strategy game. Once your planes are in the air, you do not have to join the combat; instead you can sit back and watch from the campaign map. The real beauty of it, however, is that you can actually drop in and out of any of the aircraft in your missions at will. You can thus limit your stick time to the meat of the engagements, bypassing a lot of the more mundane flying if you choose. If you are playing the Luftwaffe, you can also drop into a bomber as a gunner, and although the mouse-controlled turrets feel more "arcade" than sim-like, it is surprisingly fun.

Novice flight simmers will not find *Battle of Britain* the most accessible introduction to WWII and may want to turn to *Combat Flight Simulator 2*, or to the bargain bin for one of the last generation of still respectable European theatre sims such as *European Air War*, *Combat Flight Simulator*, or *Jane's WWII Fighters*. Serious simmers will not be able to avoid this game, however, because flaws or not, its scale and truly dynamic mission environment are the stuff of dreams. —*Nick McElveen*

THE GOODS

GENRE Flight Simulation

PUBLISHER Empire Interactive

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 400, 64 MB RAM, 3D Accelerator

MULTIPLAYER 2-8 Players; Internet, LAN

RATING ★★★½☆

EVERYONE E ESRB

UPSIDE impressive scale and depth

DOWNSIDE Deep is not always fun

A Soaring Spitfire.

Fighters filling the sky like gnats!

The Catteni are big and ugly, but have glass jaws; even little Angel can take down a brute like this with three or four punches. (Is that Cisco?)

UPSIDE

The compact disc is probably incapable of physically hurting anyone

DOWNSIDE

It still shouldn't be left alone with small children

Simplistic point-and-click combat or not, Angel should avoid Peacekeeper guards when she's unarmed.

Freedom: First Resistance

You'll have to look hard to find a worse game released in the past year

Freedom: First Resistance, a third-person action/adventure from Red Storm Entertainment, is adapted from Anne "Dragonriders of Pern" McCaffrey's undistinguished series of novels about the enslavement of humanity by an evil alien race called the Catteni. Millions of people have disappeared and those who remain have been herded into concentration camps under the watch of Peacekeepers—humans collaborating with the E.T. conquerors. You assume the role of Angel Sanchez, a prisoner in one of these camps, immediately after she receives a mysterious offer to join the human resistance.

From there the plot proceeds through 18 missions in which Angel signs on with the plucky freedom fighters and then spearheads a drive to show those ugly aliens what-for. Varied locations aside—you launch your own invasion of TV studios, occupied hospitals, a sewer (groan), a warehouse (groan), and so on—the whole thing seems tired from the beginning. McCaffrey must have used up her creative juices cranking out the *Dragonrider* books, because there's nothing here that would be unfamiliar to anyone old enough to remember the *V* television miniseries (that's the Marc Singer version, not Thomas Pynchon's) from 1983. "Hackneyed" is the kindest word that comes to mind.

A lot of unprintable words come to mind when considering the gameplay. Ads for the game make much of the "object-based puzzle solving with cascading events" featured during each mission, but they never mentioned that these conundrums would involve nothing but ever-more-elaborate key quests. Whether you're liberating medical supplies or hunting down a missing teammate, you always need to scrounge up keys or some sort of passcode.

Adventure elements are bolstered by some role-playing aspects that come into play later in the game. You eventually lead teams of three resistance fighters (chosen from a pool of five) into each mission. Each has specialized skills needed for particular tasks. Leo, for example, is best at figuring out technical matters, while big Jimmy can smash things real good. Unfortunately, the characters are basically limited to performing specific tasks and are little more than tools in the grand scheme of things. And some of these specific tasks could, in reality, be performed by anyone. Claire's athletic abilities are needed during the TV station mission simply to climb over a two-foot gap between stairs, for instance.

The action side of the ledger is arguably even less fulfilling. Angel and her companions get into a good number of scraps, but these involve nothing more than lining up an enemy and clicking the left mouse button as quickly as possible until someone dies. That someone is often you, as your character will occasionally, inexplicably pause and allow a foe to get in an extra shot or two. Melee weapons such as your fists and shock poles are actually preferable to more powerful devices like Catteni pistols because the game doesn't feature an aiming reticule. As a result, it's virtually impossible to hit enemies from any distance. You also can't fire while moving. It doesn't take long to realize that going toe-to-toe with the bad guys is the only way to fight in *Freedom*.

Presentation values are terrible. Slowdowns and hard-drive gnashing are common, and parts of outdoor levels are nearly unplayable because the framerate drops into the low teens. There are no rewards for enduring these frustrations. Screen resolution is limited to a measly 800 by 600, and textures are blotchy and dark. Levels are depressing and empty. Even when you do come across another human being, that person is inevitably one of just three or four character models used in the game (that bald gent with the mustache really gets around).

Audio is equally bad, though at least the voice actors have a sense of humor. Nearly every character in the game is a racial stereotype of one sort of another. Angel sounds like the female version of that "I am Inigo Montoya..." guy from *The Princess Bride*, and her early resistance contact Seamus couldn't be any more "Irish" if he held a potato in one hand and a bottle of whiskey in the other. Not so funny is the presence of audio clipping and buzzing. Rarely can a level be finished without the score and effects popping or even crapping out altogether.

Freedom: First Resistance reinforces the old maxim that computer games based on licensed properties are bad... even when nobody's ever heard of the license in question. Your best bet? Leave this game at the store and pick up a VHS copy of the *V* miniseries if you really need a cheesy alien invasion fix. —*Brett Todd*

THE GOODS

GENRE Action/Adventure

PUBLISHER Red Storm Entertainment

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 300, 96 MB RAM, 3D Accelerator

MULTIPLAYER None

RATING ★☆☆☆☆

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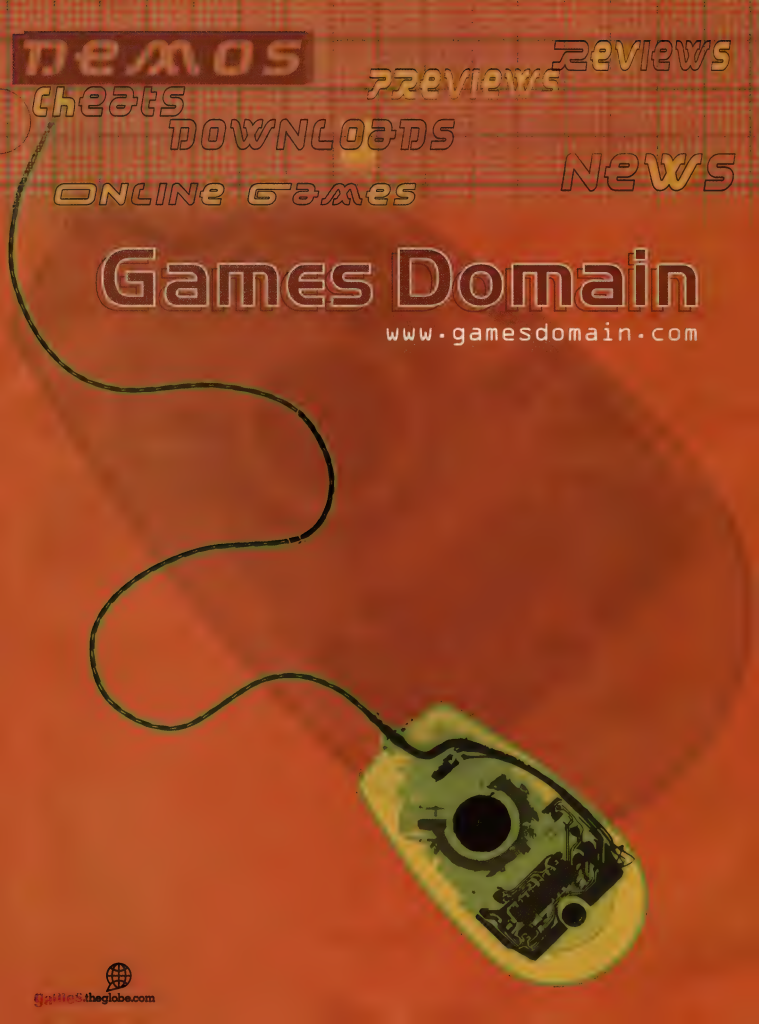

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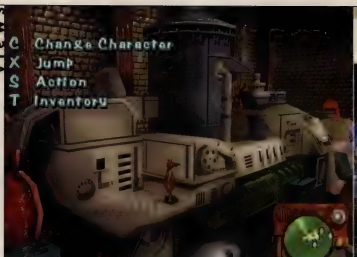


UPSIDE
It's Metal Gear Solid with chickens!

DOWNSIDE
It's not as good as that sounds

Chicken Run

Finally, Metal Gear Solid with poultry

[left] If they had based the game on Deus Ex, a good title for this review would have been "Deus EGGS," with three exclamation points after it. Maybe next time.

[above] Amer-egg-an M-egg-ee's Stal-egg 17!

Chicken Run, the movie, was a barnyard retelling of Billy Wilder's World War II comedy/drama, *Stalag 17*. So it makes some sense, then, that *Chicken Run*, the game, is a semi-remake of Konami's drama/unintentional comedy *Metal Gear Solid*, but with chickens. Sadly, as *egg*-cellent as that premise sounds, thanks to some monotonous gameplay and a lazy job of porting it from the PlayStation, *Chicken Run* ends up being merely medi-*yolk*-re. Seriously, though, there may be more egg puns later in the review.

Here's the basic structure: you take the role of one of the stars of the movie—such as Ginger, Rocky, or Fletcher the Rat—and go on a sort of scavenger hunt around Tweedy's chicken farm looking for various items. Once you've found and retrieved all the items, you're rewarded with a digitized scene from the movie and access to the next level. Occasionally, there's a mini-game tossed in.

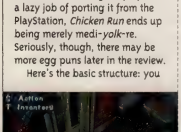
During the hunt phase, the controls are almost exactly like those of *Metal Gear Solid*. The camera tracks you from an elevated, third person viewpoint as you sneak around the environments. You can press your feathered back against a wall to make the camera drop level to you, often granting you a straight on view of what's around a corner. There's even a scene that pays homage to *Metal Gear's* infamous cardboard box disguise, in which you go deep undercover as a big rubber boot. One option the developers curiously chose not to borrow is that game's ability to switch into a first person mode so that you can examine your surroundings. Its absence, combined with the closeness of the camera, removes some of the more deliberate tactical planning that went into playing *Metal Gear Solid*. Often, you'll find yourself just scurrying forward and hoping for the best.

In place of armed terrorists, *Chicken Run* pits you against Mr. and Mrs. Tweedy and their guard dogs. Your chicken HUD contains a small radar screen that shows nearby enemies and their cones of perception. Enter one, and the attached dog or Tweedy is alerted to your presence and will actively attempt to capture you. While this may sound like the makings of a decent *Metal Gear Solid* clone, the lack of gunplay to break up the sneaking eventually makes the game tedious.

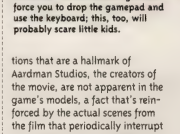
There are some arcade side tasks scattered throughout the game, such as a *Kaboom*-esque egg catching level and a modified version of the old classic *Artillery Duel*. While they do tend to break up the monotony a little, most of them are incredibly simplistic, like something packaged as a throwaway bonus in a *Chicken Run* themed screensaver. They also lead to another of the game's problems. The PC version is a direct port from the PlayStation. As such, it's perfectly suited to joystick control, and, in fact, the hunt mode includes completely adequate gamepad support. Unfortunately and inexplicably, some of the mini-games require you to put down the joystick and use non-configurable keyboard controls. It may seem like a minor complaint, but it's such a bizarre and obvious oversight that it leaves you with the impression that nobody bothered to play the game after porting it.

The environmental graphics are generally excellent. On the other hand, the expressive facial animations that are a hallmark of Aardman Studios, the creators of the movie, are not apparent in the game's models, a fact that's reinforced by the actual scenes from the film that periodically interrupt the action. There's also some new dialog voiced mostly by actors impersonating the original cast, with varying degrees of success. Whoever Eidos hired to imitate Mel Gibson should be fired... out of a cannon, directly at the guy whom Fox hired last year to do Bruce Willis' voice in *Die Hard Trilogy 2*.

Ostensibly, *Chicken Run* is aimed at kids. Will kids like it? Who knows. Kids aren't known for their great taste. At its best, it's kind of a simulation of watching the movie. Unlike simulations of, say, piloting a rocket ship to Venus, you can actually just go rent the movie, have a better time, and save yourself twenty-seven bucks in the process. —*Erik Wolpaw*



Homage to Metal Gear Solid's cardboard box.



You never know when the game will force you to drop the gamepad and use the keyboard; this, too, will probably scare little kids.

THE GOODS

GENRE Tactical Chicken Action

PUBLISHER Eidos

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 200 MMX, 32 MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER None

RATING ★★½☆☆

Dino Crisis

How to turn your $2,000 PC into a PlayStation emulator

Timing is everything in the finicky world of videogames. Release a title at the right moment and you've got a blockbuster. Release a title at the wrong moment and you've got a disaster. Everyone involved with the business knows this.

That's why it's difficult to understand why the presumably astute people at Capcom issued a PC port of *Dino Crisis* right before Christmas. The *Jurassic Park* ripoff-slash-*Resident Evil* clone first saw the light of day on the Sony PlayStation two years ago, and it's years removed from anything that the average computer gamer wants to play today. The word "anachronistic" was invented for times like these. That's not to say that *Dino Crisis* is a bad game. While it certainly comes packed with glaring flaws, these negatives are often concealed beneath a strangely enticing B-movie plot and pace that's up there with the worst that late night Cinemax has to offer.

Puzzles in the game—like the generator one pictured here—aren't difficult of you know your primary colors.

You know that it's bad when the Evil Secret Organization™ has its logo painted on the foyer floor.

THE GOODS

GENRE Action/Adventure

PUBLISHER Capcom

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 200, 32 MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER None

RATING ★★★☆☆ MATURE M

Strange things have been happening at a secret military base on Ibis Island. Rumors circulate that a presumed dead scientist named Dr. Edward Kirk is in charge of a peculiar experiment involving a revolutionary new energy technology. As Regina, you're sent in as part of a team of special agents to determine if Kirk really is alive.

Of course, things don't work as planned. Your communications specialist doesn't survive his drop, leaving you cut off from the rest of the world, and scaly refugees from *The Flintstones* have had a gay old time killing everyone at the facility. Now you've got to find out what happened, locate the mysterious Dr. Kirk, and get out alive. Pass the popcorn.

Okay, so that's pretty stupid. But in the limited context of the game, it works. The sense of isolation as you creep around the deserted hallways and dino-trashed offices is nicely massaged into an eerie atmosphere. Audio adds a lot to the general sense of unease. The steady roar of the surf pounding against the nearby beach when you're in the base's backyard further cements that sense of loneliness (either that, or your humble reviewer's watched the final scene of "Planet of the Apes" one too many times). When you're inside, a combination of the spooky musical score, dead silence, and the occasional rattle of a dino claw from the darkness ahead do the trick.

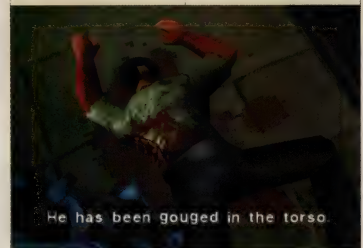
Capcom is unparalleled in the console world for establishing a suitable mood in survival horror, and the ambience is ladled out in ample doses here. Although you will battle offscreen foes at times, dramatic cinematic touches such as a T-Rex smashing its head through a nearby window and more subtle expressions such as a moonlit hallway make the defects of the third-person viewpoint easy to live with.

UPSIDE

Capcom spins a captivating yarn

DOWNSIDE

Do any PC owners want to play a two-year-old PlayStation game?



Pixelated wounds or not, that's gotta hurt.

It's T-Rex time! You might want to keep away from the windows.

Other problems aren't so forgivable. Though the storyline occupies Regina with a skillfully scripted blend of shoot-dino gunplay and puzzle-solving, neither element is all that fulfilling. Killing enemy raptors, compys, and pterodactyls requires just basic button pushing. Puzzles are nothing more than time-killers for anyone who has a third-grader's mastery of the alphabet and the ability to tell red from green. All of this usually fits in with the game's internal logic, though occasionally you'll stop and wonder at the sheer ridiculousness of using colored blocks to line up pipes and a keycard system that actually tells you how to break its code.

Capcom added almost nothing graphically when porting the game from the PlayStation. Direct3D hardware acceleration support has been added, but only for characters and dinosaurs; background art remains grainy and two-dimensional. And everything has been blown up to 640 by 480 from the console system's lower resolution of 320 by 200, which ensures that even Regina's supposedly curvy form has all the visual appeal of a pile of bricks. Even worse, a lot of the text is unreadable. The map screen, for example, is so jumbled that the "S" (denoting a save game room) comes out as a couple of pixels. This is a big problem in a game where you can only store your progress in these special chambers.

Dino Crisis represents just a diversion of a few hours in this day and age. It's more of a walk down memory lane for lapsed PlayStation devotees than a real game, though it can pack plenty of appeal for those so inclined. Dedicated PC gamers who missed out on the whole *Resident Evil* phenomenon of a few years ago also might want to see what the fuss was all about. —*Brett Todd*

Multi-car pileups are frequent due to overly responsive controls.

UPSIDE

Nutty gameplay, successfully blends fun and realism, slick visuals, huge expanses of terrain, comprehensive online support

DOWNSIDE

Annoyingly shallow, AI issues, overly-sensitive handling

Sun, sand and shocking fender benders wait on Hawaii's shores.

1NSANE

Games without frontiers

For better or worse, racing games that eschew predefined tracks in favor of limitless terrain have become the latest automotive fad. Titles such as 4x4 *Evolution*, *Motocross Madness 2*, and *Midtown Madness 2* couldn't be a hotter commodity this season. With so much attention lavished on these front-runners, a little gem from Codemasters called *INSANE* could well slip through the stores beneath your radar. Though merely a fresh entry in a long line of European imports, this is a game that serious off-road fans shouldn't overlook. The game easily earns its immigration papers by sporting a sexier, user-friendlier spin on off-road romping than anything seen to date.

While a realistically plausible learning curve lurks in the shadows, you won't find championship competitions or quick races monkey-wrenched by an overwhelming attention to detail. Gameplay is classic arcade style zaniness; drivers wrestle for control of flags, rush through checkpoints, or smash into each other mercilessly. The physics model also follows this train of thought, with fun squarely touted above realism. Although all vehicles feature unique handling attributes, they slip, slide, roll over, and crumple like home console roadsters. Excessively loose controls make the going treacherous on bumpy terrain, but overall players of every skill level will appreciate the sheer genius of their playability.

Quality craftsmanship also shines within the title's architecture. In solo mode, a grid full of themed contests beckons lone road warriors. Completing an initial trial opens more play variations and locales for your enjoyment. You score points by placing in events; once a high enough tally is racked up, you graduate into another class of challenges and unlock new cars. In an interesting twist, you needn't even complete all tests before sauntering off towards bigger and better things. This eminently welcome design quirk alleviates the need for anyone to suffer through less preferred undertakings. Future game designers, are you listening?

Impressive foundation aside, *INSANE* is not without flaws. Rivals exhibit limited artificial intelligence during certain sequences such as Destruction Zone, merely following humans and making themselves nuisances. Even novices can tear through the single player experience in no time flat as well. What's more, the underlying gameplay is somewhat simplistic, in part because of its nearly boundless layout. Every mode is a minor variation on basic capture the flag, gate hunt, or checkpoint race building blocks. With no juicy finite ending ever in sight, there's little motivation for pursuing a continued obsession in the coming months.

Extensive multiplayer support was meant to alleviate these worries. Much ado has been made about *INSANE's* online capabilities. Although dedicated serves and native LAN and Internet support definitely extend the replay value, there is no real earth-shattering content here. Worldwide ranking is the primary benefit of international competition (hello, ego trip). Most of your long-term enjoyment will come from the comprehensive terrain builder that goes active after a solo mode victory. Take such criticisms with a grain of salt, though; this title features more lifelines than most competitors of its ilk.

Besides, who could stay mad at such a lovely suitor? Codemasters' pride and joy shamelessly courts casual bystanders with beautiful textures, dynamic vehicle models, and lush terrain. Championship runs are merely good excuses for a trip around the world to exotic environs like Australia, Niger, England and Zimbabwe. Mind you, Utah's in there as well; many consider the capital of polygamy a foreign country unto itself. Wherever you travel, you're treated like a prince with stunning vistas of desert sands, frozen tundras, and rolling green hills. Plenty of visual impact can also be attributed to the autos, which crumple apart and lose entire parts in spectacular fashion.

Beefy sound effects hit just the right note as well. If engine roar evokes aural ecstasy in your mind, plan on never leaving the keyboard again. Smashes, crashes, and outdoor bashes ring loud and clear, as do sputtering cries from those stranded in Hawaii's pristine waterways. Classy hard rock tunes that accompany most endeavors are another big plus.

Various minor niggles notwithstanding, *INSANE* is one mean mother of a four-wheeled game. Warts and all, it still offers classy pick up n' play handling, efficient interface, and stupendous presentation. Only serious refinement or a full-blown genre evolution could outdo this excellent first effort by an unknown Hungarian team. That's something that the creators should be proud of, even if you will eventually pass their protégé over without any regrets when next year's floor models hit the showroom.

—Scott Steinberg

THE GOODS

GENRE Racing

PUBLISHER Codemasters

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 233, 64MB RAM, 3D Accelerator

MULTIPLAYER 2-8 Players; Internet, LAN, Modem

RATING E — ★★★★☆

UPSIDE
Outstanding archaeological experience for anyone with an interest in Egypt

DOWNSIDE
Point and click interface feels a bit restrictive in this modern 3D era

Riddle of the Sphinx

To the airshaft and beyond

Your quest begins with clues (and coffee) left by Sir Geoffreys.

Most of today's adventure games can be classified into two distinct sub-genres. There are character-based games in the manner of *The Longest Journey*, and there are "empty landscape" games like *Myst*. In the latter category, you explore uninhabited environments while learning about events that occurred prior to your arrival. Generally, these are lonely quests with breath-taking scenery and mind-bending puzzles.

The story behind *Riddle of the Sphinx* is a perfect fit for the empty landscape scenario. You play an archaeologist following the footsteps of Sir Gil Blythe Geoffreys—an Egyptologist who is missing and presumed dead. You explore the ruins of the Sphinx and the Great Pyramid at Cheops, finding clues left by Gil to guide you towards the discovery that led to his demise. Following up on the real-life work of Rudolph Gantenbrink, your exploration of the pyramid's airshafts leads to a chain of discoveries that culminates in a spectacular find. This is not a contrived story. Instead, it is one based on a combination of historical facts and modern speculation.

The game is the product of over five years of effort by Jeff and Karen Tobler, a husband and wife team whose shared passion for Egypt is evident in every moment of this adventure. Their depiction of ancient chambers and temples (real and imagined) is remarkable—hieroglyphics cover the walls and richly detailed treasures lie strewn about in various stages of disrepair. A visit to any Egyptian web site with pictures will confirm the accuracy with which they have recreated the inside of the Great Pyramid and the site around the Sphinx. The Toblers' commitment to this game is most obvious when you read the credits—the pair is responsible for the game's design, direction, animation, and programming.

Your virtual tour of the Giza Plateau provides a better view than you could hope for on a visit to Egypt. There is no tourist congestion and no access restrictions to impede your travels and you are free to wander, at will. The game is filled with wonderful details that add to the experience. When you find a pair of glasses that are not yours and put them on, the world goes out of focus. When you fly a helicopter between dig sites, your aerial view from your helmet vibrates with the rotors. And, as you manipulate a robot down an airshaft, the video feed is a grainy black and white image.

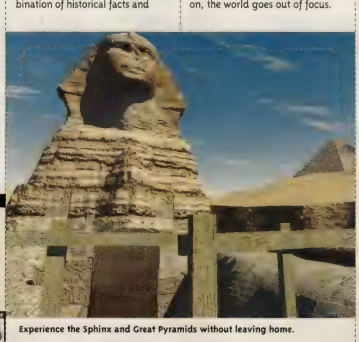
For the most part, the game is dark and haunting, as you explore inner pyramid chambers and venture deep underground. This is balanced by outdoor segments in which you emerge into the desert to find giant statues carved into cliffs and the ruins of once grand temples. Throughout *Riddle of the Sphinx*, an original musical score by Jeff Tobler adds depth and emotion to your experience and heightens the sense of mystery.

There are no puzzles for the sake of puzzles and you are spared the aggravation of the often-convoluted "find and use" adventure logic. In this game, gasoline runs a generator. You don't mix it with cat fur to make a mustache. While interpreting the symbolic clues is challenging at times, the hardest part of this game is making sure that you have explored every nook and cranny and looked from every possible vantage point. You solve the ultimate "riddle" behind *Riddle* by gathering tablets, artifacts, and keys that use hints provided by scrolls that are scattered throughout the ruins. Be advised that there are a number of traps that can end your game in a heartbeat; the cautious adventurer should save often.

The return to a slide show "point-and-click" interface may be painful if you are used to playing 3D games that offer full freedom of movement. This is mitigated to some degree by a "VR" mode that allows you to pan in a full circle at certain locations in the game. There is also a "warp" feature that speeds your return to a position previously visited. Although the cursor changes according to your navigation options, it can be confusing at times and you may find yourself zigging when you intended to zag.

For the adventure purist, *Riddle of the Sphinx* is an intriguing journey that should not be missed. For those who do not typically enjoy lonely exploration, this game may still be a trip worth taking for the sake of learning and experiencing a bit of the Toblers' Egypt.

—Cindy Kyser Morgan



Experience the Sphinx and Great Pyramids without leaving home.

THE GOODS

GENRE Adventure

PUBLISHER Dreamcatcher Interactive

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 166, 32 MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER None

RATING ★★★★☆ EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

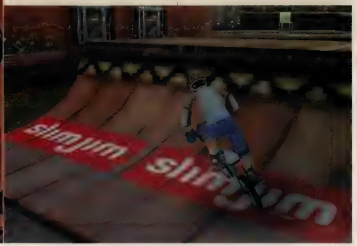
Not quite riding into the sunset.

UPSIDE

A Tony Hawk-style game for players who've graduated from high school

DOWNSIDE

Replayability is hampered by a lack of options



That one constant of extreme sports games—product placement.

Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX

Mr. Tony Hawk, you have company

At first glance, *Dave Mirra's Freestyle BMX* seems like a clone of *Tony Hawk Pro Skater*. Sure, the boards have been swapped for bikes and less groovy lingo, but the game remains the same when you're popping stunts in half-pipes to the accompaniment of attitude bands like Sublime and the Deftones.

Or does it? Even though this extreme sports title is obviously a cash-inspired homage to the hot-selling *Tony Hawk* series, it manages to stand on its own two wheels. Anyone looking to quickly dismiss it as just another ripoff in the same vein as *MTV Sports: Skateboarding Featuring Andy Macdonald* had better take a long second look, as this game is a great experience in its own right.

Perhaps the best and most novel aspect of *Dave Mirra's Freestyle BMX* is that you don't have to possess the reflexes of a 14-year-old to play it. As enjoyable as the *Tony Hawk* games are, they're designed for hardened twitch game veterans with the hand-eye coordination of Kobe Bryant. The initial goals are so difficult to reach that many players might walk away before unlocking a single skatepark.

That isn't the case here. Dave's game lets you ease into the action. To unlock each of the levels you paid for, all you have to do is complete amateur objectives such as knocking over deck chairs, making specific leaps, and accumulating a reasonable number of points (they start at 5,000). These tasks increase in difficulty, of course, but they do so in a gradual way that encourages the player to keep trying rather than to just give up.

Controls are also much more reasonable. Where *Tony Hawk's Pro Racer 2* requires exacting work with the gamepad, *Dave Mirra's Freestyle BMX* allows you to mistime a button push by a fraction of a second without fracturing the biker's collarbone. The result, again, is a game that gives hope to players even when they don't complete an objective. Watching the blood fly when Tony does a faceplant is oddly attractive the first few occasions you see it, but you're ready to pull out your hair after watching such a crushing fall for the hundredth time.

Another bonus is a great user interface that keeps you apprised of your objectives at all times. You'll always know exactly what you have to do, thanks to text blurbs and green highlights that illuminate the object or ramp needed for the next stunt. Player tips also pop up on the screen at appropriate times during solo runs.

Visuals are about the only thing a nitpicker could complain about. While the bike and rider are rendered in sharp 3D, much of the scenery is composed of blocky 2D images that wouldn't be out of place in a PlayStation title. The game generally plays too fast for these deficiencies to be any real bother, though every now and then the action will slow down enough for something (such as the flowers scattered around the truck depot or the chain link fence in the final Acclaim Max Games stadium) to stand out. Textures are also subpar. Look too long at what Z-Axis used to fill in walls and other large objects and you'll end up with a screaming migraine.

This lack of attention to the graphic quality also affects gameplay to a certain extent. Collision detection is quite poor throughout the parks, especially where "grindable" objects such as boxes and stair railings are concerned. Fail a crate grind and you can get stuck inside it for a few moments. This will usually cause at least one more fall before you can escape. While this problem can be a nuisance when time is tight, it never becomes a major issue.

One further bone of contention involves the lack of options and frills. There are just three solo modes of play with no multiplayer complement. You can only sign on as one of 10 pro riders with preset stats, making the career-like ProQuest mode less than engaging. The 12 BMX parks are nicely varied—including a forest, empty swimming pools, and a cool West Coast beach—but they lack the out-there zaniness displayed by the competition. This just isn't a game designed to hold your attention for untold hours. So don't bother with it if you're looking for something to occupy your time until spring.

But make sure that you do buy it if you're up for a lot of quick thrill rides. *Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX* is one of the most rewarding console-style games to grace the computer in some time. Those of you searching for another stunt-happy extreme sports game would be advised to give this one a shot. It may lack a few options and some of the depth that computer gamers normally require from their purchases, but few currently available action titles boast such compelling action.—*Brett Todd*

THE GOODS

GENRE Sports

PUBLISHER Acclaim Entertainment

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 200, 32MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER None

RATING ★★★★☆

EVERYONE E ESRB

F1 Championship Season 2000

EA Sports delivers another update for a winning simulation

If you played and enjoyed Electronic Arts and Image Space's *F1 2000*, chances are good that you know what to expect in the sequel. Take that game and speed up the graphics a bit, add a new training mode, polish the AI, and offer rainy day racing and all the real-life grids from the 2000 Formula One season and you've got *F1 Championship Season 2000*. If that sounds appealing to you, then you can't go wrong with this year-end update to a great F1 racing sim. If you're looking for more, you might be disappointed.

F1 2000 was possibly the best F1 racing simulation released all year. While it didn't offer the dynamic weather found in *Grand Prix 3*, it did have current season cars and tracks as well as the first virtual form of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway's Formula One circuit. That alone was worth the price of admission for some F1 fans, even though it turned out to be a bit off the mark in its looks. In this new edition, Indy only gets the most minor of adjustments graphically, which may put an immediate damper on American fans' opinions of the game. As successful as F1's return to Indy was this past year, it's a shame there isn't a better rendition of the circuit.

The gameplay remains largely unchanged but seems tweaked to provide a better driving feel. You can configure the game for "on rails" racing that even a two year old can enjoy, or crank everything to "hardcore simulation" levels that may have even the best sim racers scratching their heads on setups. Spa has been completely redone and now better resembles the best driver's circuit in F1. Monza, site of a horrific crash this past season, has had the first chicane altered, making it a better track both in real-life and in the game. One of the best updates gives the game its name—you can race against the qualifying times and line-ups for each race in the past season. Think you can turn a faster lap than the Ferraris did in Japan? Set up a single race and find out. Even the weather will be similar to the real deal.

Rain was something that you didn't have to contend with in the earlier release; that's been rectified in this one. Unfortunately the weather has only three modes. Sun, overcast, and wet conditions will change your setups, but you won't have to worry about conditions going from beautiful to dark and rainy during a single session. After seeing the deft handling of weather in *Grand Prix 3*, the rain in this game doesn't have the same punch. As it stands, the wet weather racing is entertaining but can hit your framerate hard at times. There are lots of cool effects such as road reflections and fog, but they tend to drag down the speed of the simulation.

Slow framerate is one mark that the original game had against it. This new version seems improved—that's a good thing. Now that the engine is aging and the graphics are starting to look a bit shaggy around the edges, slow performance is more difficult to tolerate. There's a lot of customization that can be done to improve the speed on slower systems, but be prepared to sacrifice a lot of detail if you're near the minimum system requirements.

The game includes a great new training mode that utilizes a two-seat Formula One car. You ride along with a professional driver who shows you the ins and outs then tests you on those concepts. The training is truly helpful, but since it's confined to two tracks you are left with the feeling that much more could have been done.

Unlike EA Sports' other "end of year" product update (the superlative *Superbike 2001*), this title lacks sufficient new material to make it truly noteworthy. Like a facelift for the Indy circuit, any extension of new features will have to wait for the next product. *F1 Championship Season 2000* is an excellent game for those that didn't buy it the first time around, however, when it was called *F1 2000*. —*David J. Long*

UPSIDE

The best F1 action currently racing, new training segments very helpful

DOWNSIDE

Graphics engine starting to look dated, more of an update than a whole new game

Heading for Eau Rouge, one of the most famous sets of turns in the world.

Schumacher waits for the lights at the first race in Australia.

Release the hounds!

THE GOODS

GENRE Racing

PUBLISHER EA Sports

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 233, 64 MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER 2-8 players; Internet, LAN

RATING ★★★★☆

E EVERYONE ESRB

Clearing the way for Axis bombers.

UPSIDE

17 authentic WWII aircraft to control and see blown to bits

DOWNSIDE

Low-res graphics and repetitive gameplay are less fun than playing with real models

Why would anyone think that a couch would work in this room?

Airfix Dogfighter

It's time for the dawn patrol... from the bedroom

There are usually two types of people who build model airplanes: those who painstakingly build and paint them for display purposes, and those who have more sinister intentions in mind—the burning and blowing up variety. Those of you in the second category should be able to appreciate the concept behind *Airfix Dogfighter*, which brings the "toys coming to life and fighting it out" sub-genre of gaming to the living room. While the *Army Men* franchise had adequately covered the war on the ground, those seeking a similar styled action in the air title have mostly been out of luck. But developer Eon Digital Entertainment has created a unique little simulation based on the popular Airfix World War II model airplane kits.

This time around you get to refight the Second World War on the home front with the bedroom, living room, basement and even backyard as the theater of operations. You fly a variety of period aircraft (of the 1/72nd scale model variety) and must complete a series of objections, such as bombing enemy bases or hitting their factories, over the course of 20 unique missions (10 for each side). Along the way you can pick up power-ups like glue and firecracker bombs while taking out enemy positions, appropriately scaled model tanks and even dog fighting with other aircraft.

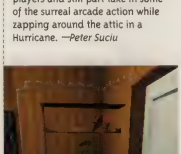
The concept, like many of these toy-based games, sounds like a sure fire hit—who wouldn't want to build and battle with 17 various WWII aircraft including the Spitfire, P-51, Me109 and Me262. Like so many of the titles, however, the end results leave you fondly remembering that playing with the real model is much more rewarding. The biggest problem with these games is that they often don't know whether they're depicting the fun-filled visions in a child's mind or if this is what toys do when we're not around. *Dogfighter* doesn't explain the how and why the toys have come to life.

In the *Army Men* universe the toys "live" and fight in an alternate reality, but no similar background is given here. There is no setup whatsoever to establish why sentient toys are battling it out in this small suburban house, save for the presence of a child's bedroom. How and why the two sides engage in war is a mystery, as is the question of how the tanks get placed on shelves that seem even out of reach of the average child. This appears to be one of those areas that are best left unanswered, and just requires an extra dose of suspension of disbelief.

Since it's more of an arcade game than hardcore simulation, don't expect the individual aircraft to offer much in the way of "realistic" flight modeling. Most of the planes handle pretty much the same way with minor differences. Jet aircraft, like the Me262, can fly much faster than other aircraft, but that isn't always an advantage in a living room environment with walls and lots of tacky furniture to dodge. While the game has an option for using a joystick, it seems impossible to set up properly. Fortunately the flight controls are simple enough that your keyboard should suffice.

Since this is a game based on model airplanes, you'd also take for granted that you could actually build and paint your planes. Unfortunately it appears that these models already pre-assembled. There is no option for creating variations, but you can at least choose from the camouflage patterns as well as either historical or fictional insignia for their planes. In addition, you can design your own symbols for the aircraft, and more importantly you have the option of changing the layout for the theater of operations (otherwise known as "the house").

The bottom line is that *Airfix Dogfighter* is probably a take-it-or-leave it title, depending heavily on your interest in WWII aircraft and, more importantly, whether you have any interest in model airplanes. The graphics aren't overly impressive and the style is somewhat cartoonish. The individual missions are inadequately short but also overtly challenging — most require numerous attempts to complete them successfully. The one area where the game can be a bit of fun is in the multiplayer mode, in which you can play with up to seven other players and still part take in some of the surreal arcade action while zapping around the attic in a Hurricane. —*Peter Suciu*



An Allied P-61 is in our sights.

THE GOODS

GENRE Model Airplane Simulation

PUBLISHER Paradox Entertainment

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 266, 32 MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER 2-8 players; Internet, LAN, Modem

RATING ★★½☆☆

EVERYONE E ESRB

UPSIDE

Lots of tutorials for all ages; the King engine is even more powerful; a huge database of games

DOWNSIDE

A number of bugs; online matching is no longer supported; not a huge leap over Chessmaster 7000

Chessmaster 8000

The latest from the master of chess for the masses

If you're the producer of the *Chessmaster* series of chess programs, you're faced with a real challenge to make each year's edition new and fresh. It's not like you can spice up the rules, or add a new back-story.

The approach that this franchise's developers have taken has been to add lots of learning features and throw in nifty looking chessboards and sets. Last year's incarnation boasted a new interface, a "kids' room," and some nice tutorials including an entertaining and educational set of lessons by former kid wiz Josh Waitzkin (*subject of the 1993 film* Searching for Bobby Fischer—*ed*). *Chessmaster 8000* introduces no truly new innovations, choosing instead to expand several elements of *Chessmaster 7000's* feature set. For example, the graphics layout is the same as last year, but the graphics themselves have been upgraded to 16-bit color. Still, it's difficult to tell the difference when you look at the two games side by side. As always, you can load the screen up with all manner of windowed playing aids (such as the thinking window), a moves list, annotations, and so on. Unfortunately, you still can't go the other direction and play with a full screen board.

A few new chess boards and sets of pieces have been added, but while they are great in a "hey, come check out the neat chess set that looks like cupcakes" sense, they are almost impossible to play with. You'll probably end up playing with a top down 2D board and a pretty standard Staunton set. Sound isn't normally a big factor in chess games, and inadvertently it's even less of a factor here. For some reason the game goes silent when you select either the theme sounds or simple sounds. This problem was recreated on three different computers.

One of the new chess sets: the classic "deserts" pieces used in all international tournaments.

On the plus side, there are tutorials and training aids as far as the eye can see. The most entertaining is the expanded set of game commentaries delivered by Waitzkin. His enthusiastic vocal analysis of a variety of games is personal and illuminating. Particularly welcome is a new section in which he teaches endgame techniques, an area ignored by most beginning players (to their detriment). Another nice addition to this year's iteration is a set of "match the masters" problems, in which you are challenged to determine the master's next move in a tournament game. The powerful King chess engine used by the *Chessmaster* series has been made even stronger, now rated at Grandmaster level. While that sounds impressive, the market to whom this program is targeted will never notice the difference—it's as if you were playing Michael Jordan in a little one-on-one basketball, and then he told you that he can now jump two inches higher and hit his three-pointer from five feet further out. It hardly makes a difference in the outcome.

There is also a bug in the displayed game score that can be very confusing if you are using the game as a learning tool. The score is a numeric representation of which side is winning—a negative 1.5, for example, would mean that black is ahead by one and a half pawns. This score should take into account positional as well as material advantage. Unfortunately, when the score is between 0.99 and -0.99, the sign is left off, resulting in misleading values.

More personalities have been added. These are a series of character opponents, complete with photos, biographies, and playing idiosyncrasies. It's much more entertaining than simply changing the game's playing level, and provides a nice touch to tournaments that you can set up. In addition, you can create your own new personalities, with tremendous control over every aspect of their playing style. Unfortunately, you still cannot attach a custom picture to personalities that you create.

There are several other small bugs and annoyances, such as missing annotations in printouts. In addition, online play no longer includes matchmaking services (included in previous versions) with which to seek out other folks on the Internet that might be looking for a game. Now you can only hook up via LAN, modem, or by entering the TCIP/IP address of a pre-identified opponent. None of these shortcomings are game breakers, but overall you get the feeling that the game was rushed to market. It's still the best mass market chess game you can buy at your local software shop, but with a few bugs squashed and the fuller featured online features of last years' version revived, it could be a much better program. *—Jeff Lackey*

Chess sets such as this jungle set are fun, but a bear to play with.

THE GOODS

GENRE Chess

PUBLISHER Mattel Interactive

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 233, 48 MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER 2 players; Internet, LAN, modem

RATING ★★★☆☆

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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DBA Online

Fightin' Figs on the Internet

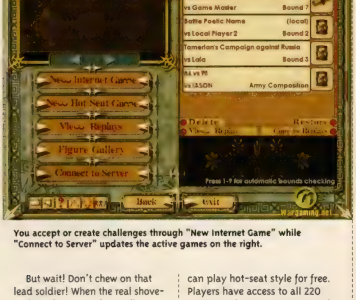
UPSIDE
Unique topic, great system, incredible variety, clean system

DOWNSIDE
2D graphics, no pre-made battles, can be pricey

A Greek phalanx begins its inexorable advance; the pop-up window gives vital information about the unit and the strategic map in the upper right shows the whole field.

Veteran miniature wargamers will recognize *De Bellis Antiquitatis* as one of the premier pre-modern miniature rules systems available. Any sizeable convention will have at least one group of lead-and-Styrofoam warriors pushing figures and tossing dice over battles that range from the barely formed mobs of the Bronze Age to the armored and trained armies of the early Renaissance. What happens when players don't have twelve square feet of empty space to play, however, or when they can't round up the gang for several hours of refreshments and lousy die rolls? They get frustrated, that's what.

You can download the game program and updated army sets for free from www.dbaol.com, or you can get everything on a CD for $15.95. Although the game lacks a computer opponent, you miss the tactile feel of the pieces, but you don't have to worry about rebuilding the field after an errant dice barrage either. Using Battleware software, you can use the tactical concepts and some of the graphical experience of the tabletop game in two modes of head-to-head play. In fact, some devotees may find *DBA Online* to be a gratifying expansion of their gaming community instead a rainy day substitute.



You accept or create challenges through "New Internet Game" while "Connect to Server" updates the active games on the right.

But wait! Don't chew on that lead soldier! When the real shove-and-twirl version of *De Bellis Antiquitatis* isn't available, *DBA Online* allows you to get your fix on a computer screen. You may can play hot-seat style for free. Players have access to all 220 armies and twenty-six maps. The graphics are 2D and only about half of the units are painted, but what is lost in glitz is more than made up in variety. The system covers more than the usual Mediterranean and Western European armies—Aztecs, Mayans, Indians, Chinese, Nubians, Magyars, Croats, and all flavors of Goths are represented with their unique weapon systems. Lack of nationalities and units is certainly not one of the game's shortcomings.

The interface for army composition, placement and game play is a clear and forgiving click-and drag proposition. Click on units and the menu changes, allowing group or single unit movement. A hand appears for lateral or vertical movement and a half-circle icon allows pivoting at the front corners. If movement requires precision, a diagram mode provides movement by example. Pop-up windows for movement, units, or display options have all necessary information. This feature is very important, as Version 1.22 rulebooks are rare and Version 2 is not yet in print. Beginners can learn the essentials from the index on the website and the pop-up displays. Combat occurs after the movement phase is over and is largely automatic; players are only involved if a unit has a choice of targets. Maps have four levels of zoom and show zones of control, terrain type and range. Many of these aids can be toggled off and on.

The beauty and heart of *DBA Online* is the smooth Internet play. Turns, called "bounds," are sent to a server. Players receive e-mail notification of challenges or new bounds. Connections are fast and stable. Because moves are made off-line, players with limited Internet access don't have to worry about on-line charges. The re-play feature is crucial to game-play—opponents see each other's moves as many times as desired at several different speeds. For that all-important personal touch, you can insert remarks, complements or taunts into bounds. The computer is a strict game master, so quibbles over movement and results don't occur.

Nothing good is free and *DBA Online* can be pricey. Full membership is $9.95 a month. Membership allows unlimited number of games and entry into tournaments as well as a shot at the World Cup. Unsure of the value? An introductory offer of $9.95 allows you to play ten games, two full games with the gamemasters and eight other games that end after three of one side's units are destroyed. With 145 full members, challenges aren't rare. The lack of sound and pre-made historical battles, the 2D graphics and fairly obscure topic may make *DBA Online* a niche game, but connoisseurs of ancient, medieval and push-of-pike gaming should give this fine system a long and serious look.
—*Jim Cobb*

THE GOODS

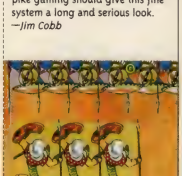
GENRE Online Wargame

PUBLISHER Wargaming.net

REQUIREMENTS Pentium, 32 MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER 2-players; same machine, Internet

RATING ★★★★☆



Persian auxiliaries maneuver to make the best of a bad situation.

UPSIDE
The fast pace of the game requires quick thinking

DOWNSIDE
Not enough questions, no two player or tournament mode, tries to be funny—but isn't

ESPN's Two Minute Drill

The *You Don't Know Jack* series and its multitude of expansion sets made computer trivia games fun again. The games were funny, fast paced, littered with questions, and followed a rule of thumb that all trivia games must follow: they were best played with a group of friends. *ESPN's Two Minute Drill*, a game based on the television show of the same name, is nothing like the *You Don't Know Jack* games, aside from the fact that it's fast paced.

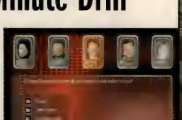
The format is simple; the first round consists of choosing questions in one of five categories, if you miss a question you must choose another category before you can go back to the previous one. The categories can range from baseball to figure skating, so you need a well-rounded knowledge of all things sporting to do well. After two minutes, the round ends. In round two, the questions hit you from every direction; you cannot choose the order in which the questions appear. Each correct multiple-choice answer in the first two rounds earns you a point. If you answer all of the questions in a certain category you receive bonus points. Round three consists of a three-part question that forces you to type in your answer; this round is considerably more difficult. You can select your topic—either baseball, football, basketball, golf, or hockey—but the questions are for hardcore sports fans only.

Several ESPN anchors are in the game from the deadpan Kenny Mayne, the hip Stuart Scott, to the teddy bear-like Charlie Steiner. Their comments lack variety and the one-liners become stale after only a few games.

And that's pretty much it. There is no multiplayer mode at all—you can't even play the game against a buddy on the same machine. The only way to play against a friend is to play through the entire game by yourself and count scores accordingly, but even that is a poor gauge because if you answer the round three questions you receive a massive point bonus and most games end up riding on that alone. The game does keep records for top scores, but that's the extent of the multiplayer support. Oddly enough, the game show on ESPN is nothing like this; only the winning player even gets to the third round on the television program.

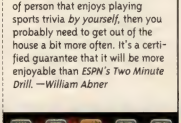
The biggest failing in the game is that repeat categories spring up only after a handful of sessions. Charlie Steiner's "Hot Corner" category, which deals with Major League Baseball third basemen, popped up three times in the first 15 games played. And all of the questions inside the category were identical. That's not a good thing in a single player trivia game.

Let's face it, if you are the kind of person that enjoys playing sports trivia *by yourself*, then you probably need to get out of the house a bit more often. It's a certified guarantee that it will be more enjoyable than *ESPN's Two Minute Drill*. —*William Abner*



Kenny Mayne is funny (In real life).

THE GOODS
GENRE Sports Trivia
PUBLISHER ESPN The Games
REQUIREMENTS Pentium, 16MB RAM
MULTIPLAYER None
RATING ★★☆☆☆



Never ask an Abner a horse racing question. Piece of cake!

Make sure your seat belt is securely fastened, and your tray table is in its upright and locked position.

UPSIDE
A thorough simulation of a modern airliner cockpit

DOWNSIDE
Pricey for a single-plane add-on

737 for Fly!

Terminal Reality's *Fly!2K* featured some nice improvements over the original release, but it was still missing one thing: big iron. The largest plane included with the sim is a business jet. Now Wilco Publishing has released *737 for Fly!*, an add-on takes the original game into the big (jet) leagues.

In a world of freeware add-on planes and multi-aircraft expansion discs for flight sims, you may wonder why the heck Wilco is charging $40 for a disc with only a single aircraft type and a few sample flight scenarios. Jumping into the virtual cockpit of this 737 shows that Wilco has put quite a bit of time and effort into this add-on, however.

The airplane in question is the 737-500, one of the new-generation "glass cockpit" models. And what a beautiful cockpit it is—the recreation here is authentic and huge. You'll have to do lots of scrolling to see the whole thing (one of the few downsides). Everything from Flight Management Systems (FMS) to the autopilot to the Fasten Seat Belt lights is here and in the right place. it makes the 737 in *Flight Simulator 2000* look positively primitive.

Planes look great on the outside as well. Flaps, spoilers, and landing gear deploy realistically. Fourteen airline liveries are included, from US carriers United and Delta to European airlines such as Virgin Express, British Airways, and Olympic. Having so many 737s flying around adds some much-needed variety to the air traffic that you'll encounter, although it's a bit disconcerting to encounter a Quantas 737 in Dallas.

The plane flies as good as it looks. Coming in for a landing with the flaps fully dropped and popping the spoilers to bleed off speed at the last minute feels very authentic. It truly handles like an airliner, and you can manage flights manually or using the FMS. Detail fans can even manage fuel flows, or adjust passenger loads to affect handling. The included PDF manuals are decent, but the systems detail here really cries out for a flight instruction tutorial.

737 for Fly! is a nice package. The biggest gripe is that it costs more than *Fly!2K*. Sim fans interested in seeing what it's really like to manage a modern airliner may find it to be worth the steep price, however. —*Denny Atkin*

THE GOODS
GENRE Flight simulation
PUBLISHER Wilco Publishing
REQUIREMENTS Fly! or Fly!2K
MULTIPLAYER 2-20 players; internet
RATING ★★★½☆

UPSIDE	DOWNSIDE
Just as addictive as earlier versions, draft preview, more stats	Poor interface, annoying bugs and lockup problems, several flaws from previous versions remain unfixed

Front Office Football 2001

Still the best NFL general manager simulation money can buy

Front Office Football emerged on the scene three years ago. Designed and distributed by Jim Gindin, sole employee of a one-man company known as Solecismic Software, the game developed a loyal following thanks to its addictive and unique gameplay. Who would have thought that managing an NFL team, working the salary cap, drafting rookies, setting starting lineups, watching your team grow over the course of several years (or even decades), and generally creating your own personal football universe could be so much fun? The latest version continues this tradition. Despite its flaws it's a terribly addictive game—the kind of game where you look at the clock and refuse to believe that you've been playing for five hours without a break.

The new interface is the most obvious change from earlier editions. EA Sports retooled the entire look of the game by adding specific team colors and logos to the main game screen. If you play as the Browns, for example, you are greeted with a brown and orange backdrop with the classic orange helmet resting in the background. It looks better than ever. As far as functionally goes, however, it's no better than last year, and some parts are actually worse. The scroll bars are miniscule, for instance; it's very difficult to scroll through your roster unless you have a mouse wheel.

The game's improvements are important, but rather subtle. New post game stats such as bad throws, QB hurries, drops, and passes defended are tracked. These new stats are a great addition—they add detail to a player's performance. Other new post game stats highlight where your team had the most success running or passing the ball, as well as a detailed summary of each possession. You now have the ability to dictate substitution levels when setting up your game plan, and you can instruct your top cover man to blanket the other team's "go to" receiver on every down.

The draft is vastly improved. You can view players in the draft during the free agent signing period. As GM, you should have a good idea of the stock that is coming out of college each year before draft day arrives. The rookies themselves are more realistic in that there are only a few perennial starters right out of college. It happens from time to time, but most rookies need time to develop. Rookies do not always pan out, however. In earlier versions, when you drafted a player with high potential, it was a certified guarantee that the player would blossom into a star. Not so anymore. It's delightfully aggravating when you draft a highly touted linebacker and he turns out to be another Brian Bosworth. Conversely, just because that seventh round pick from Southwest Podunk State looks like a water boy doesn't necessarily make it so.

It's impossible to deny the addictive nature of the game but it is equally obvious that despite being delayed for months it's not quite ready for primetime. It's prone to crashing on Voodoo-based video cards. There are times when you may not receive all of the players when you are working a multi-player trade. Other times, a team tells you that if they make a trade that they will run over the salary cap, when it's just not the case.

The most annoying problem (outside of the lockups) is the free agent system. When a player becomes an unrestricted free agent, regardless of his talent or playing time the previous year, he asks for a laughable amount of money to resign. It's just crazy.

The Browns had a wonderful year in 2004 going 13-3, but lost the AFC Championship game to the Colts.

The game tracks several new stats this year.

What's more mysterious is that the CPU GMs will sign these rejects. Something is just flat out wrong when Baltimore resigns its backup QB to a five-year 45 million dollar contract—to be backup for *another season*. It is equally bizarre that there are top-notch players available for signing after training camp concludes. Why the computer managers ignore these players is anyone's guess. It makes no sense that Randy Moss would go unsigned until week two, as an unrestricted free agent, and then signs a two year deal for peanuts after coming off an All-Pro season. There are other annoyances such as the inaccurate opening day rosters (which is unforgivable since the game shipped weeks after the season started) and the strange play calling during games.

These problems mar what is otherwise a highly enjoyable game. *Front Office Football 2001* remains unique in that it is the only NFL simulation of its kind, but it's just a shame that it has yet to reach its full potential. —*William Abner*

Front Office Football 2001 is available only as a direct download from EA Sports (www.eastore.elicense.com/fof2001/).

THE GOODS

GENRE Sports

PUBLISHER EA Sports

REQUIREMENTS Pentium, 16 MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER None

RATING ★★★½☆

games.theglobe.com

Console Domain

www.consoledomain.com

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Code Blue

The not-so-wacky doctor game

Gaming's representation of the healing arts has generally been restricted to finding and then eating a big hunk of meat. In most games, the treatment of wounds is a way to occasionally break up the monotony of killing things. Since 1998, however, Legacy Interactive has worked to create a niche market for realistic medical simulations such as *Emergency Room, Emergency Room 2,* and the overly eager sounding *Emergency Room: Freeway Pileup!* Its latest product, *Code Blue,* is more or less another sequel to *Emergency Room,* with a new title to accommodate a license from the Learning Channel show from which it gets its name. It's a full motion video game like *Dragon's Lair,* but instead of periodically having to move the joystick to the left, you'll suddenly have to figure out how to read the results of an arterial blood gas analysis. As a simulation, it crosses the line between entertainment and drudgery. Just so there's no mistake, that's in the direction of drudgery.

You play the role of an incoming resident in the emergency room of Legacy Memorial Hospital. Thanks to your "awe-inspiring transcripts," you've been recruited to save the hospital's residency program, which is facing a loss of accreditation due to too many residents of "questionable character." With the guidance of attending physician Dr. Matt Clark—played by *Star Trek: The Motion Picture's* Stephen Collins—you must successfully treat a series of patients whose ailments range from simple lead-based paint chip poisoning to enormous, sucking chest wounds.

You begin each scenario by reviewing the incoming patient's chart. Based on the three or four sentences of information contained within it, you then scour the game's medical database for relevant information about his or her potential condition. Once you're satisfied that you've done all the necessary preparation, a cut scene introduces the situation. After watching that, you're presented with a view of the prone subject and given access to about fifty different medical devices and diagnostic tools. Through a point and click interface, it's up to you to utilize the correct tools in the proper order and within strict (though hidden) time limits to both diagnose and, if necessary, stabilize the patient. After you've done everything you can think of to do, you have to note the diagnosis and any hospital and discharge orders on the patient's chart.

At this point, you may see another cut scene that shows the formerly sick person praising your doctoring skills. Generally, though, it'll feature the irate patient screaming at you or, if the patient is now too sick to talk or just dead, his or her relatives screaming at you. That's because *Code Blue* is hard. It's not challengingly hard in any kind of satisfying way, but rather it's just bafflingly hard. Perhaps the game was designed for people with lots of pre-existing medical knowledge, because that's about the only type of person who's likely to be able to figure out what the hell to do at any given moment.

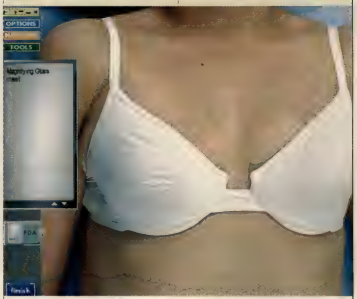
After every few patients, you're given a performance review in which you're told exactly the steps you should have taken in order to succeed. As a layman, it's difficult to figure out how the game arrived at some of the "correct" decisions. Not particularly fun research in the game's medical library only appears to provide about three quarters of the information necessary for success. Filling out the patient's chart is especially difficult as it contains over a hundred checkboxes, out of which you must pick the correct four or five.

The game does offer an easy mode that highlights the tools needed in the correct order. Unfortunately, it offers no help with the charting and features a bug that occasionally causes it to keep recommending the same tool over and over again. The easy mode also doesn't relax the strict time limits, which don't offer you much chance to think about what you're doing.

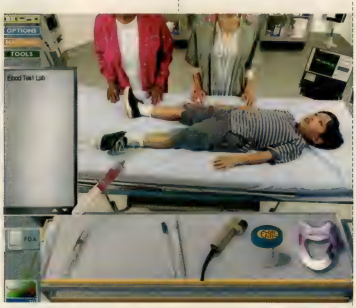
Each patient has one unvarying treatment sequence, so once you've played through the game's 35 cases, there isn't much reason to play it again. That'll probably be just fine with you, however, because ultimately *Code Blue* boils down to reading an extensive in-game manual and then taking a multiple-choice test on its contents. —*Erik Wolpaw*

UPSIDE
It could teach you enough to treat actual patients

DOWNSIDE
The game's manual makes it very clear that you're not supposed to do that



Examining a twisted ankle.



This kid ate paint chips. Like all new patients, he will be immediately defibrillated.

THE GOODS

GENRE Point-and-Click Medical Textbook Adventure

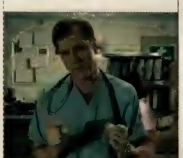
PUBLISHER Legacy Interactive

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 233, 32 MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER None

RATING T

★★☆☆☆


Stephen Collins, star of this full motion video game and Star Trek: The Motion Picture.

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UPSIDE
Accessible approach to complex concepts, good AI, interesting scenarios

DOWNSIDE
Modest graphics, learning curve steep for beginners, no campaign

Combat Command 2

Boku Strategy Games puts the "grand" back into tactical

Are you feeling "tac'd" out? As excellent as *Combat Mission* and Talonsoft's *Campaign Series* are, worrying about side shots on a Pzkw IV can get tiresome. Do you long for the apparent simplicity of grand tactical combat, where companies are your maneuver elements? The *Panzer Commander* series comes close, but its larger scenario and campaign modes verge on the operational level. For grand tactical combat poured sweet and clear, Boku's *Combat Command 2: Danger Forward* is an excellent choice.

Combat Command 2 uses the board game motif unabashedly. The map is composed of hexes and units are 2D with NATO symbols and play values. Such an approach may be optimal for grand tactical games, because 3D figures tend to raise expectations of tactical nuances best addressed at a lower scale. The map graphics are better than pedestrian but still a tad generic. The 500 meter-per-hex and two hour-per-turn scales have just the right feel.

From this basis, the game proceeds to do what board games typically fumble—deal with opportunity fire, command control and supply. The computer manages all this without making you count hexes, make notes, or debate line of sight. Command goes from division and regimental headquarters to combat units. Divisions trace 32 hexes out to regimental HQs or units attached directly to them while regimentals HQs control companies within 16 hexes. The computer establishes contact levels within these ranges

German troops move on Maleme landing field on Crete. The display to the left shows the values of the selected units.

by rolling a 100-sided die against a value of 100 modified by fortification levels and enemy zones of control. In short, if you have enemies in your rear, kiss command control goodbye. Out-of-command units cannot assault in conjunction with other units, can't use artillery or air support and have their movement values halved.

Supply determination is similar, with lines of any length being traced back to HQs and supply sources. Units with limited supply lose attack strength while unsupplied units can lose crucial quality values. Opportunity fire is automatic during movement, and you can select direct fire and assault targets. Easily accessible reports show the state supply, command, and combat situations for all friendly units. Supply and command must be maintained in order to win—even to the extent of re-assigning units.

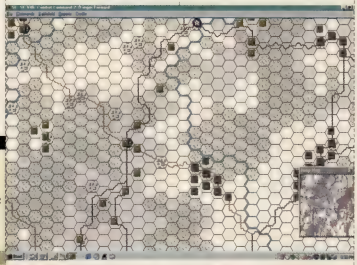
Units have the usual values for movement and different kinds of combat. They represent companies comprised of three platoons or "hits." Taking a hit is the most damaging combat outcome but the most frequent negative result concerns the most important value, quality. Units undergo quality checks as results of combat, withdrawal or special units. Quality falls with disruption and bad supply but increases in reserve. The side with less disruption has a better chance of gaining initiative and consecutive turns. Thus, this intangible is critical in the game.

Units assume five postures, the functions of which define the units' abilities in each phase. Attack posture allows normal movement, while travel allows road movement. Direct fire requires units to be in defensive posture but attack posture is necessary for assaults. Reachable hexes are well shaded; target hexes are not, challenging your visual memory. Choosing combinations of attacking units is easy through pop-up windows. Combined with the many reports, beginners may be daunted by the many windows and overlays but options for customizing can turn this embarrassment of riches into fine playing aids.

Of the twenty scenarios covering the Mediterranean and Western Europe primarily during 1943 and 1944, eight include air or sea assaults. Designer Dave Erickson puts the randomizer into overdrive with them, adjusting landing hexes for wind, weather, tide, enemy action and pilot experience. You are thus challenged to pick up the pieces of any plans and extemporize with dispersed forces. With all the other variables, *Combat Command 2* becomes extremely challenging when you play it solitaire. The seamless play-by-email and TCP/IP modes heighten this sense of adventure. Changing scenario parameters and a nice editor enhance re-playability.

Scenarios are short—only three or four days—and a sense of disappointment is inevitable when they are over. Grand tactical battle should be brief but, after nurturing a regiment through a battle, letting go is difficult. A campaign mode would be welcome.

Combat Command 2 will intrigue veteran players, while weaning beginners from more glitzy but shallow games. —*Jim Cobb*



Shivering Gis await the panzers in snowy St. Vith.

THE GOODS

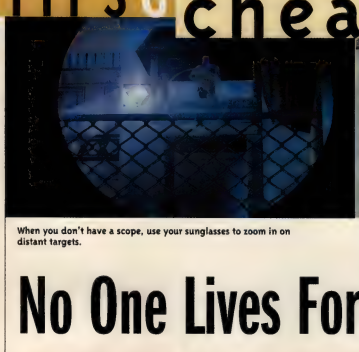
GENRE Wargame

PUBLISHER Shrapnel Games

REQUIREMENTS Pentium, 32 MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER 2 players; Hotseat, PBEM

RATING ★★★★☆



When you don't have a scope, use your sunglasses to zoom in on distant targets.

Civilians in this pose will no longer offer you useful information; so try not to shoot near them.

No One Lives Forever

But you might live longer with a bit of assistance

THIS WALKTHROUGH ASSUMES THAT YOU HAVE SELECTED THE DEFAULT WEAPONS and gadgets for each mission. If you need a particular item in order to complete a mission, and you haven't brought it, you can always find that item somewhere on the level in an obvious place. All scenes at headquarters are omitted, as are some of the more self-explanatory sections in each scene.

In each level, there are more spots where intelligence items can appear than there are intelligence items. Each time you play the game, you will find certain intelligence items in different spots. You will not be able to find some items until you possess a gadget that only appears in later missions; in order to get a perfect score, you must replay these mission later.

Some levels feature alarm systems, and it is satisfying to attempt to beat these levels without setting off the alarms. One of the tougher alarm levels (Berlin at Night, Scene 1) is covered in detail, just in case you want to enjoy a no-alarm challenge.

Misfortune in Morocco, Scene 1

After Bruno asks you to switch locations, you should open the right-hand window in room 13 and stand back a bit from the windows so you can cover the area more effectively. The overturned table in room 13 will provide protection when you are attacked through the doorway.

Misfortune in Morocco, Scene 2

When violence frightens civilians, they take on a characteristic pose—cringing, usually kneeling down, with their hands up by their faces. You can make your way to Bruno without alerting any civilians, but it takes some cunning.

The woman by the soda machine is in a difficult spot, as is the receptionist who tells an enemy about nice vacation ideas. Up the stairs from the soda machine is a red-coated guard who does not patrol. If you sneak up the stairs and toss a coin past him, you can creep up behind him as he begins to walk.

The receptionist will not cower if you dispatch the guard with a karate chop, after he has concluded the conversation and taken up his post. You may need to distract him with some noise so that he leaves his post momentarily; when he returns to it, he may face in a more helpful direction.

When you run into the woman who complains about the "goons in the hall," talk to her until she agrees to distract them for you. Take the outside route to avoid this pair. The ensuing pair should be taken out with karate chops when the white-suited fellow is facing the same direction as his red-suited brother.

After the cut scene, make your way back to the room with the shallow rectangular pool. On your way there, explore thoroughly and kill all enemies before they shoot their hostages. Keep an ear open for ticking, which signifies bombs attached to walls.

Misfortune in Morocco, Scene 3

After the first fight, go to your right so that you end up above the people that are talking about the monkey. A guard runs into the clearing, looks around warily, and then moves into the nearby alley. Drop down quietly from the corrugated metal and distract him with a coin. Slip past him into the door, then climb the stairs and chop the guard there in the neck. You will have to dispatch one more guard above you on a balcony before you can move on.

In the final courtyard, pick off the guards below with your rifle before venturing across. Stepping over the broken wooden bridge at the far side of the courtyard will end this scene.

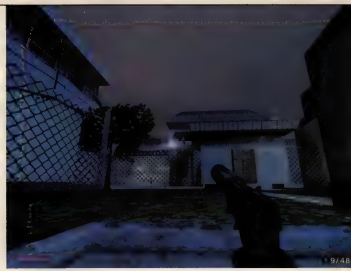
Misfortune in Morocco, Scene 4

Along the valley is a minefield. Next to the van is the *fire extinguisher*; it's worth a few trial-and-error runs across the minefield to acquire this item.

Just around the corner is the smugglers' hideout, where your mission objectives will update. In front of their hideout is a ruin that contains a well. Leap into the hole to the water below.

When you emerge from the water and climb the stairs, you will have a choice of climbing more, or entering a large courtyard. Climb the stairs. Lure the two guards above you down into the stairwell to kill them. Continue, and when you hear the guards discussing a ship they have seen, sneak by to their left and descend the stairs.

Pass by the humming machine, take a left, and go out into the courtyard just ahead to your left. Watch out for the guard lurking in the entryway. Along the left-hand wall is the entrance to a series of rooms connected by keyhole-shaped doors. At the far end of the series of rooms, the mission ends with a cut scene.



Berlin 1: A burst of three shots from your silenced pistol can drop a guard with virtually no noise.

Berlin 3: Here's where you can hide right after you disembark the elevator.

HIP TIPS

If you don't have a weapon with a scope on it, use your sunglasses to zoom in on anything in the distance that is difficult to see. You can also use your sunglasses as a sort of scope for any weapon, by zooming in with them, switching to a weapon, and firing it without shifting your view.

Berlin by Night, Scene 1

This scene is very difficult to beat without setting off the alarm, but it can be done. Speak with the gentleman standing in front of you. Your updated mission objectives will lead you into the hotel to room 205, where a knock will prompt the fellow inside to slip a note under the door. Continue following your objectives until you have entered the main gate.

The first pair of guards can be quietly dispatched if you wait for them to begin patrolling, then shoot them with your silenced weapon when they are out of camera view. Near the armored truck is a locked trapdoor that leads down to a sewer and then up to a small building that contains the inner gate switch.

Stand to one side of the door, open it, and lure the guard outside with a coin toss. Kill him with one shot, and flip the switch without the camera seeing you. Sneak to the trap door and deliver three shots from your silenced pistol into the sentry up in the tower behind you. Now go through the sewer and circle around to the gate.

Toss a coin just inside the gate to lure a guard out to you. Kill him with one shot. When the patrolling guard's back is to you, run along the wall to your left until you are beneath the sentry in his tower (you may need to toss a coin to your right as you run, to distract the man in the tower). Toss a coin over the shoulder of the guard by the crate, so that he comes down off the platform to stand on ground level by the crate. While he is doing that, backtrack to the gate area and deliver three silenced shots into the tower guard. Now the remaining two guards in this area can be stealthily dispatched.

Sadly, you must shoot the dogs in the next area, after you have shot the tower sentry and the guard on foot. Lure the guard from his office with some noise, and sneak in. A button in the next room turns off the security cameras. Kill the patrolling guard, and then lure the stationary guards from their post by the exit, one at a time.

Berlin by Night, Scene 2

Right around the corner is a truck, and near the truck is a gate in a dark alley. You may find this fairly secret route helpful if you are trying to beat this scene stealthily. One of the detonators may be in the storeroom at the end of this alley.

You must photograph a pair of books on this level's library, and set the timers on three detonators that are positioned throughout the level. The position of the detonators varies from game to game; you will always find them attached to a small pile of barrels, however.

Werner von Haupt is standing at the end of an outdoor alley. Take out your cigarette lighter and use it on him. The entrance to the facility is inside the building to your left, down a set of stairs you find just inside the entrance. Find the swiveling bookshelf to end the scene.

Berlin by Night, Scene 3

To reach Doctor Schenker, locate the elevator on the main floor. At the top, move forward a bit and crouch beside the bookshelf, waiting for the patrolling guard to pass you. Slip behind him and run straight up the hall to the dark stairwell. The doctor is within a room viewed from the hallway via three large square windows. Once he is following you, go down one flight and locate the dimly lit door beside three file cabinets.

If the doctor is alarmed by gunfire, holster your weapon and reassure him (hit the use key while pointing at his huddled form). Once you and he exit the dimly lit door, a cut scene will end the mission.

Unexpected Turbulence, Scene 1

Look on the floor for a hatch that allows you to bypass the blockage in the room in which a seat blocks the door. On the far side, climb the steep stairs and enter the cabin. You will be knocked unconscious, but left alive.

Unexpected Turbulence, Scene 2

Retrace your steps to the back of the plane, using the hatches as before to bypass the blocked doorway. You will encounter one final guard who is blown backwards out of an opening; shortly thereafter, you too will be sucked from the plane.

As you fall toward the fellow below you, shoot any other falling enemies, but do not shoot the man you are chasing. Once you are

Turbulence 1: When the airplane seat blocks the doorway, look on the floor for a sliding trap door.

Turbulence 2: Your attackers parachute from the plane, so in between attacks, look above you at the plane.

To karate chop guards, move up behind them until the almost fill your screen from top to bottom; now swing before you get any closer.

HIP TIPS

When you switch weapons, the new weapon comes up fully loaded. Often it is faster to switch weapons than it is to reload the weapon you are holding. If you have more than one kind of machinegun, for example, you can switch back and forth between them to "reload."

near him, steer yourself onto his back, and you will steal his parachute and land safely.

Rendezvous in Hamburg, Scene 1

Speak to the woman standing in front of you. Open and climb through the window to the right of the bouncers when your friend distracts them. The manager's office is up the spiral stairs; beware his security camera as you inspect his desk.

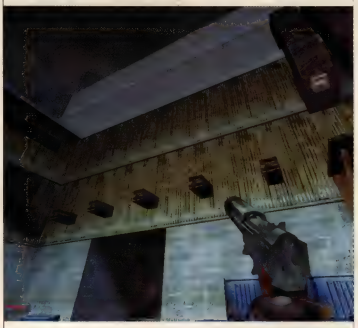
After you talk to Goodman, walk to the ladies' room (past the fish tanks and down the stairs). Enter the room and watch the cut scene.

Rendezvous in Hamburg, Scene 2

To your right, as you leave the bathroom, is a hallway that leads to a storage area. Fight your way through this area until you reach the stage, where Goodman will contact you.

A doorway leads from the stage into a room with an open crate on the floor. The window next to the crate opens, allowing you to jump through. An assassin will kill your contact after the cut scene ends.

Behind you is an alley that leads to a dank stairwell. Follow it down to a courtyard that overlooks a waterway. Get on the barge that is floating down the waterway to end this scene.



Tenuous Lead 3: Jump across these beams, after zipcording to them, to find the earplugs.

A Tenuous Lead, Scene 1

Make your way inside the gate and around the corner, where you will see a pair of tall tanks with a valve between them. Turn the valve, which brings a guard from a nearby building to investigate. Enter the door from which he emerged to continue.

Walk through the steam vent room, avoiding the steam, and go downstairs past the electrically charged ladder. Below, two guards are discussing the missing valve. A switch in their room turns off the electricity that blocks the ladder. Climbing the ladder takes you to a valve that drains the acid from a pool in the room below the walkway that passed through the steam vents.

Get the valve handle from the drained pool of acid and insert it onto the stem. Go downstairs to the switch room and exit the double doors to find Goodman.

HIP TIPS

Doors with handles (or knobs, or valves) that jiggle can eventually be entered. An AI character, usually inside the door, may open it once you trigger the event (by killing a guard, finding an objective, and so on). If you try a door and hear a knocking sound, the door will never open.

A Tenuous Lead, Scene 2

The four detonators are spread around the warehouses, each one attached to several barrels. The position of the detonators varies from game to game, but you will always find them on the sides of a small pile of barrels.

A Tenuous Lead, Scene 3

In the room where a blue car is parked in an alcove, look above you for a zipcord hook; leap the wooden beams to reach the *earplugs*. Back on the ground, walk beneath the yellow metal stairs to continue. Make your way through the rest of the warehouses and hallways until you reach the railroad cars. A small cage contains a ladder that leads up to a walkway far above. Pick the lock and climb up, jumping to the next available crate and riding it into the ship.

A Tenuous Lead, Scene 4

The chemicals that you need to photograph are stored in colored barrels that are placed conspicuously throughout the ship. The positions of the barrels will vary slightly from game to game; you will recognize them by their bright colors (they are blue, yellow, red, and green respectively).

There are two large warehouse areas on the ship—the one you start in, and one at the far end of the level. Hunt for barrels in quiet corners of both warehouses; you will find another barrel somewhere in the hallways and rooms between the two areas. In the second warehouse, some stairs and a mechanical lift take you to the final barrel.

At the far corner of this massive room is a vent cover that has been pulled from the wall, revealing an air duct. Follow it and take the

final right hand turn, pushing open the grate at the end. Drop down and open the locked section of the cage. Climb ladders until you are knocked unconscious at the top.

A Tenuous Lead, Scene 5

Fish around in the water until you find the cigarette lighter. Use it to torch your way past the lock on the door. Take all right hand turns until you come to the room with an electrically charged walkway. A switch at the top of a ladder turns the charge off. Climb on the railing near the switch and jump to the beam, and then to the walkway.

Drop down into the bunkroom and find a pistol, and a *silencer for the Parabellum*, in the water. Use it to kill the guard outside the door, and to destroy the shaking valve in the room beyond. As the ship floods, swim up through the hole in the walkway and hurry through the door, closing it behind you to stop the flow of water. Walk past the bridge and into the radio room. Hit the use key as you face the radio, and the mission will be complete.

The Dive, Scene 1

Make your way through the hotel hallways until you hear a couple of fellows discussing the blocked elevators. A complaining maid will emerge from a doorway behind you, after you fight the guards.

Inside the doorway is a room with two windows. Open the one on the left and climb out onto the ledge. Follow it around to your left until you arrive at the fire escape. It is blocked, but you can use your belt buckle to zip over to a hook in a window across the street from you.

The Dive, Scene 2

A window at the far end of the attic opens onto the rooftop. Crawl out and shoot the guards. A window along the roof opposite opens into another attic. Climb the stairs and enter the air duct, emerging over a street. Leap from the gutter to the trellis across the street.

Jump to the ground and climb the ivy-covered trellis at the end of the street. Scoot along the gutter to the piece of roof that is gently sloped; climb up underneath the tank that sits on the roof. Sneak along the gutter up here all the way around to the air duct.

The air duct will collapse, dumping you into a kitchen (and usually into a vat of beer as well). Follow the hallway, killing the guards above you; this opens the door, allowing you to exit the scene.

The Dive, Scene 3

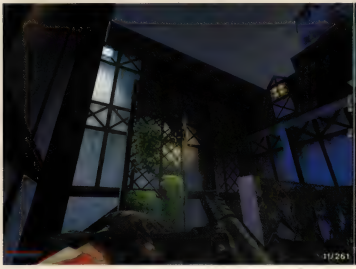
Enter the ship through the blasted hull. Swim up through the hole in the ceiling beside the flashing light. Enter the door and take a right; the next door on your right is an office, where the manifest hovers above the desk. Back out in the hall, go to your right and swim out into the warehouse (beware the sharks).

Move through the vent system and subsequent rooms until you can swim up through a hole in the ceiling beside a flashing light. Up on this deck, you will pass the kitchen on your left (the *antitoxin* is in there). Keep going straight, then take a right and find the captain's bedroom. His log is floating above the bed.

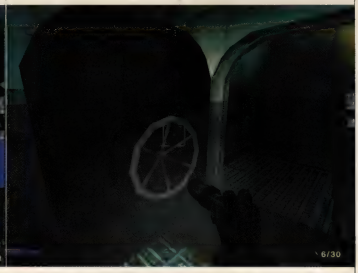
Once you snag the log, several enemy swimmers will appear along the route behind you. Follow the trail of enemies to a newly opened door that leads into a

HIP TIPS

If you don't have any coins, you can make noise by switching to run mode and scurrying around a bit in little circles. You will know if an enemy is searching for you by his footsteps and his comments.



Dive 2: The trellis at the end of the alley is climbable.



Tenuous Lead 5: After you shoot the valve and swim up, close this door to stop the water from rising.

A Stealth Primer

Why be stealthy? Apart from the enjoyable intensity which stealth requires, remaining quiet will also minimize the damage you take. On the highest difficulty level, where just a few shots will kill you, you do not want to be exchanging gunfire with every guard you meet. Best of all, however, you get to hear all the hilarious conversations.

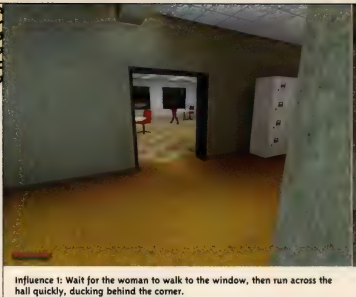
Before you can master the art of stealth, you have to understand what your opponents will react to. An enemy soldier will scan any object that moves within his line of sight. If your body is partly obscured by a corner, a crate, a barrel, or any other object, the soldier will need to scan your body a bit longer before he recognizes you as an enemy.

Because it takes an enemy a moment to scan your body even if he is close, it is possible to completely emerge from behind a corner and glance at the situation without being recognized—even by enemies who are facing your direction. You must do it quickly, but it is a safe tactic.

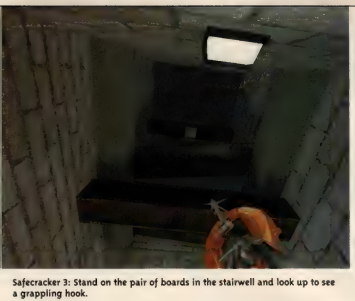
Enemies also react to sound. If they hear their comrades calling for help, they will definitely react. Other audible clues—such as the grunt of a fallen partner, your footsteps, or the clink of your tossed coins—will cause them to investigate. If they search for long enough without finding you, they will return to their patrol route (or their original position, if they are a stationary sort). If a guard investigates your noise more than three times, he may begin to actively hunt for you. This kind of guard is difficult to kill quickly (and silently), whereas a slightly alert guard will fall quietly if killed with a single shot.

There is no tangible bonus for being stealthy. If you want to simply machine-gun you way through a level, you will not suffer any penalty. The only factor that affects your bonuses is the number of intelligence items you gather from each mission. Those bonuses may boost your accuracy, damage, and quietness; the method by which you choose to gather the intelligence, however, is irrelevant.

If you are very accurate or stealthy during a mission, you may receive an "award," but this is a cosmetic label which does not affect your skills. Only a "bonus" will have such an effect, and these are only awarded to players who collect a high percentage of intelligence items.



Influence 1: Wait for the woman to walk to the window, then run across the hall quickly, ducking behind the corner.



Safecracker 3: Stand on the pair of boards in the stairwell and look up to see a grappling hook.

HIP TIPS

If you want to knock out a guard quietly, toss a coin near him and then sneak in behind him as he travels toward the sound. You do not need to be extremely close for your karate chop to land on his neck.

warehouse. Swimming along the walkway to the other door allows you to bypass the shark area.

As you approach the final hallway, wreckage will fall into your path. Swim straight back down the hallway and into the warehouse, turning to your left and swimming down. A door has opened here, leading down to a hallway. Again, wreckage will fall into your path, but an air vent going up behind you allows you to proceed. Follow it to a room crisscrossed with steel beams and swim to the top of the chamber.

A Man of Influence, Scene 1

Walk past the desk and into the yellow-carpeted hallway. Turn left and duck around the corner. Wait for the woman in the cafeteria to walk to the window, then run inside the cafeteria and stand under the camera for a moment. Now walk across the hallway into the open bathroom and light the trashcan on fire with your lighter.

Knock down the three boards near you and sneak through the storage area to the other door. Open it and dash into the security office across the way. A switch in here turns off the cameras. Dumas' private office is out in the hall to your right; the door is beneath the camera.

A penholder on the desk lowers the bookshelf, and a switch in the next room lowers some stairs. Open the curved door and go upstairs. Outside you will find a switch along the wall to your left. This opens a circular sliding wall surrounding Dumas' private quarters. Use the remote on the coffee table to raise a hidden model. Return to the front desk to end the scene.

A Man of Influence, Scene 2

Let Goodman knock on the guardhouse door to lure a guard away. Sneak behind the guardhouse and open the gate. There are three ledgers sitting on desks throughout the level. Locating them is not tricky, but keeping the alarm from sounding is. Once you do locate them, take snapshots of them with your sunglasses.

A Man of Influence, Scene 3

The man in the courtyard presents no threat. Pass him by and ring the doorbell. Speak to the butler, and he will usher you in to see the Baron. This fellow is quite full of himself, especially where hunting is concerned. In your interview, stick to this subject, and you will do just fine.

Safecracker, Scene 1

As the scene opens, you are facing a courtyard. On the other end, to your left, is a locked gate. Pick the lock and get on the lift. Now step off and go around the crates to the door under the camera. Continue until you find a forklift that you can use. It rumbles across the floor and opens a door on the far wall.

Jump the wooden barrier and take an immediate right, going down the stairs. At the far end of this massive work area is a locked gate that protects a switch that restores power to the lift, which you should now ride to the next scene.

Safecracker, Scene 2

Inge is thudding around the area practicing her sword swing and her warbling. Locate her tape player and turn it off. Behind you down the hallway is a switch on the wall that electrifies the puddle beneath the tape player. Flip it while Inge is turning the tape player back on. Repeat until she is defeated, and then find the nearby lift to end the scene. Note that while she is belting out a tune, your enemies are not able to fight you.

Safecracker, Scene 3

Cross the pair of I-beams and continue until you hear a guard asking another guard for a pair of nail clippers. Jump down to their location using the step-like wall. Down here there is a locked wooden door with a garage door behind it. Enter and look up. Use your zipcord to haul yourself up to the hook.

Take a right and circle around to the stairwell, where you will see another hook above you as you stand on a pair of boards that span the well. Climb the crates to the roof. A long rafter leads to a horizontal metal sheet below, which you can jump to in order to reach the roof below you.

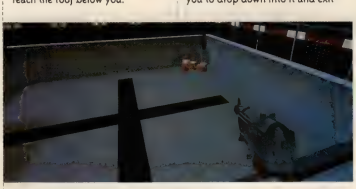
From this roof, leap to a girder that leads to a lift. Ride it down to an area where you can access the ladder that climbs up to the crane.

Safecracker, Scene 4

If you wish to be stealthy, take out the first patrolling guard with a silenced weapon. Duck quickly into the nearby door if you need to buy some time. Walk through the locker room and find the ladder that leads down. Shoot the red barrels in the corner to signal Goodman.

Enter the door at the bottom of the ladder and open the door on your left. Moving around the machinery, locate the window-washing closet and push the switch inside. Now return to the red barrel area and climb some crates to an air vent. Shoot the grating at the end of the vent, and jump to the top of the machinery. Again shoot the grating, and climb the ladder that is inside.

Push open the grate and circle behind the elevator shaft, opening and pressing the emergency door release. Go back around the shaft and jump onto the ladder. The elevator will rise and stop beneath you. A hatch in its ceiling allows you to drop down into it and exit



Red barrels explode; you'll use this trick to signal Goodman in several missions.

HIP TIPS

You can also lure guards to quiet ambush spots by letting them spot you, then running back a bit and hiding to one side. If you stop making noise when they give chase, they will drop into a slower, walking alert stance. Now you can take them out with a headshot or, if you can get behind them, a karate chop.

onto a grassy area.

Go to your right and take the walkway across to the area next to the window-washing platform. Push the switch here and board the platform. Activate the platform to end the scene.

Safecracker, Scene 5

The items are not difficult to find; what is difficult is finding them without setting off the alarm. Search the floor you begin on for items, and then locate the ladder that leads down past the air vents to the level below you.

Once you have collected enough intelligence items, your objectives will update. Locate the elevator on this lower level. Behind you and to your right is an office with a keypad on the wall. Use a code breaker on the keypad, then board the elevator.

Rescue 2: These boards may be shot out of your way so you can enter the tunnel.

If you hit your use key as you buzz up your zipcord, the cord will release, allowing you to drop to the ground before you reach the hook.

Special Items

The following is a list of some special items and the scenes in which they can be found. See the walkthrough for more details.

FIRE EXTINGUISHER (reduces damage done by heat sources): Morocco 4
SCOPE FOR CROSSBOW: Trouble in the Tropics, scene 1
EARPLUGS (reduce damage from explosions): Tenuous Lead, scene 3
ANTITOXIN (reduce damage from poisons): The Dive, scene 3
SILENCER FOR PARABELLUM: The Dive, scene 5
FUZZY SLIPPERS (reduce walking noise): Rescue Attempt, scene 3
SCOPE FOR BACALOV CORRECTOR: Alpine Intrigue, scene 1
SILENCER FOR SMG: Alpine Intrigue, scene 2
BRIEFCASE (fires missiles): Alpine Intrigue, scene 2
SCOPE FOR AK-47: Alpine Intrigue, scene 4
BACALOV CORRECTOR: Very Large Explosion, scene 1

Safecracker, Scene 6

Through the large area with the double-stairs is a hallway that wraps all the way around this lower level. If you follow it to its end, you enter a room with two low tables and a soda machine. Go through this room and the subsequent cubicle area to the stairs that lead up to a landing. Two doors exit the landing; take the one on the right, and open the door just inside.

These are the Baron's quarters. Go up the curved stairs and through the door. Use your code breaker on the keypad behind the tilted picture of a fox. Walk through the opening, wearing your infrared sunglasses. Avoid the beams! The third room is difficult: when you can, walk along the right-hand wall halfway; turn left and jump the low beam, running to the other wall; now turn right and continue to the fourth room.

This next room looks ludicrously difficult, but an air vent at your feet allows you to bypass these beams easily. Switch your glasses to photo mode, and snap a shot of the open book.

Rescue Attempt, Scene 1

Walk toward the front of the train until you see the conductor's office. Pick up the passenger roster from his desk. Now go to the back of the train, avoiding the conductor (hide in any alcove until he walks past). When you see the pair of guards arguing, walk quietly to the door near them and enter the room. Pick up the ticket.

Keep going to the back of the train, trying doors until your contact answers. He will send you back to the front of the train, past the kitchen car you began in. The assistant engineer is in the second room past the conductor's office. After you deal with him, fight your way all the way back to the caboose. Leap the circular switch, then turn and use it.

Rescue Attempt, Scene 2

A boarded-up tunnel leads from the area; shoot the boards to clear them from your path. At the far end of the tunnel, climb the grassy bank to your right, under the walkway. A sign on the side of a building indicates that a lumberyard is within the walls. Look for an opening in the building below and to the left of the sign.

Crawl under the floor until you find the hole that allows you to climb up into the building. Exit the stacks of lumber out in the yard by climbing over them. Hop on the motorcycle and ride it through the valley. At the end of the valley is a sentry building with a button inside it. Pushing the button opens a fake boulder below you. Applying a code breaker to the keypad activates a nearby door.

HIP TIPS

Some guards take up positions and do not patrol from them. If you distract them momentarily, so that they move to investigate, they will always return to those guard spots, but will often face in a slightly different direction, allowing you to sneak up and karate chop them.

Rescue Attempt, Scene 3

At the base of the walkway is a sentry station; a button inside opens the large metal door nearby. Along the hallway on your right is a windowed room with a scientist inside; get the cigarette lighter from the desk in this room, if you don't have one.

There are two rooms filled with crates, and a metal walkway that winds around each one. The security office is in a small room just off of one of the storage rooms. In the office, hit the red button to deactivate the security cameras, and get the security pass from the desk. Use the pass to get on the elevator on the level above you.

On the level the elevator takes you to, you will find a lift that goes down one more level. Before you ride it down, collect the *fuzzy slippers* from the women's bathroom. On the bottom level, you will find a locked door that contains Schenker.

Once you talk to Schenker, get the code breaker (if you need one) and go out into the hallway. Take a left and use the code breaker to open the double doors. Be sure to get the code breaker before you move on. Navigate the electrical bolts by running past them when they pause. Another doorway will require the code breaker, and then Schenker will suggest a route. Take his advice.

Trouble in the Tropics, Scene 1

An office inside the building contains a radio and microphone. Another contains the *scope for the crossbow*. Destroy the radio, and then walk through the very dark storeroom to the elevator. At the top, the elevator opposite you will explode; leap over the railing and climb the ladder to your left up to the landing. In the next area is a door that requires the code breaker; if you did not bring one, you can find one in a nearby office.

Trouble in the Tropics, Scene 2

As you progress down the valley, you will find your way blocked by a chain link fence. A small passage to your right leads across a little bog and over a bridge. At the entrance to the temple, go up the right-hand ramp and down into the stream. A pipe far above contains a hook; use your belt buckle to ascend to that hook.

Trouble in the Tropics, Scene 3

Descend into the water and take either tunnel to the blast test area. During the countdown, use the welder on your cigarette lighter to pop all eight locks around the walkway. Jump back into the water, and the blast test will proceed, destroying the test area. Climb up the two ladders and jump through the window. A door with a keypad next to it exits the scene.

Trouble in the Tropics, Scene 4 (Stealth)

Although you must not allow any alarms to go off, the mission will not be compromised if you can kill guards stealthily. Wait for the worker near you to make his way out toward the open space. Pass behind him and make an immediate right, taking cover behind the first pile of crates. When the coast is clear, continue this direction, taking out guards quietly.

You will overhear a conversation about the antidote; take cover behind the green crates, and let the scientist pass you. As you peek out, you will see a pair of guards in the next area, on patrol. The radio is in the office behind the guard on the upper level walkway. Use it to contact HQ.

Either of the two other exits leads eventually to a room where an astronaut stands with his suit on. Dispatch him to end the mission.

Low Earth Orbit, Scene 1

In security sector Goldenrod, take a right and get the security pass off the bar in the Pink Space Lounge. Exit the bar, taking a right, and summon the elevator at your first left. Up in Periwinkle, go to your left, entering the first door you come to. Straight ahead is a door that leads to a table, on which is a laser weapon. Pick it up, turn around, and exit. The door to your immediate right leads to a code breaker; get it.

Elsewhere on Periwinkle is a hatch leading to a zero-gravity area. Float up through the structure in the middle of the room, and up through a pair of hatches. In Raspberry sector, locate the two command module rooms and use your code breaker on the keypads.

Now backtrack to Goldenrod and take a lift down to Chartreuse. Continue to Aquamarine, where you must quickly run through a glass tube before a meteorite strikes it.

Low Earth Orbit, Scene 2

As you run through the exploding station, you will encounter a pair of scientists who jump into escape pods. On a table in another office is the *briefcase*. Take the lift down and get the antidote from a table below. When you return to the lift, it will collapse. Climb the shaft by jumping from one horizontal beam to the next (or, wait for a ladder to descend from the ceiling, if you have time). At the door, jump through and enter an escape pod.

Alpine Intrigue, Scene 1

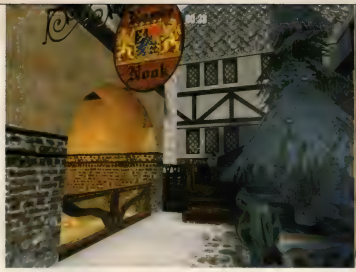
Keeping the Baroness in sight is not essential. As long as she does not detect your presence, the mission will go on. The end of the mission lies within the doorway of a house just past a phone booth and colored lights. On your way, explore the house next to the folding sign that advertises beer; you should find a *scope for a Bacalov Corrector* inside on a shelf.

Alpine Intrigue, Scene 2

Inside the building to your right is a *silencer for your 9mm SMG*. The keypad that controls the security gate is inside one of the buildings, in an office. Once you open the gate, you can most easily enter it by returning to your start position, then running

Orbit 1: After you meet this fellow, take a right to find the bar (and the security pass on the bar).

Alpine Intrigue 1: At this point, you may lose sight of the Baroness, but don't worry; you do not need to keep her in sight.



Nature of Revenge 1: This fellow tucked in the corner is the most likely one you'll miss, as you clear the streets.

If the handle of a door jiggles, it is possible to get behind it eventually (note: it may be an enemy character who opens it).

up the nearby alley and ducking around the corner. Open the heavy metal doors by using the switch to their right.

Alpine Intrigue, Scene 3

In the small courtyard that is being swept by a pair of searchlights, open the square grating in the middle of the yard. Drop down and you will break through the ice. Swim for a bit, and you will discover a hole you can climb from.

Alpine Intrigue, Scene 4

A *scope for your AK-47* is in the orange trunk near the radio in the cabin. Go outside and ride the snowmobile down the valley to the locked gate. When using the snowmobile, you might want to stop periodically and scout ahead on foot; it's easier to take out bad guys at long distances this way. Shoot the red barrels across the chasm by the building to turn off the electricity that helps bar the gate.

At the minefield, use your sunglasses to navigate. At the bottom of the valley, jump over the electrified fence, using the crate piles to help you. The tunnel ends at the gondola; flip the switch next to it, and ride it up the hill.

The Indomitable Cate Archer, Scene 1

There is an inoperable lift on this level; in order to reach the switch, you must locate a ladder in the office adjacent to the room with humming machinery. Open the hatch at the top of the ladder and look for a crawlspace to your right. Traverse the roof and enter via another crawlspace. Unlock the gate, and find the technician standing in front of an electric box. The lift below will become operational once you throw the switch on the box.

HIP TIPS

Only have one coin? Another tactic is to toss one near a guard, so that he become alert and walks to that spot. Then, instead of hitting him while he's alert, wait for him to decide that there is no threat, and then hit him from behind as he returns to his post.

The Indomitable Cate Archer, Scene 2

The level begins with a fight with Magnus; use your mobility and your jab (dash in, hit him, and step back). Alternatively, just jump on his head; he can't hit you there, but you sure as hell can whomp him good. After the fight, as you walk down the hall that has three crosses on three pedestals, look for a coin on the floor. Use it to distract the guard around the corner so you can knock him out and take his gun. Your gear is behind an impassible gate; you can reach it by jumping through an open window and heading to your right along a couple of ledges, out in the open air.

Now find the log pile Magnus mentioned. You will know you have found the right pile when you see a log poking out of its middle.

The Indomitable Cate Archer, Scene 3

When the pair of guards trap you in the poison-filled room, look above you for a hook to use your zipcord on. Haul yourself up, enter the door, climb down the ladder, and switch off the gas.

In the room that surrounds a glass-enclosed area, find the red button on the upper walkway that operates the mechanical arm that lifts the antidote onto a small moveable platform. Follow the antidote to where it stops, and use the touchpad to open the glass door. Claim the antidote to stop the timer.

Go out into the surrounding hallway and find the stairs. Look for a square grate on the ground; shoot the lock and descend. The scene ends as you approach a door down here.

The Indomitable Cate Archer, Scene 4

When you find yourself being pushed into the water at the "Have a nice death" sign, jump in and swim through the hole in the wall to the adjacent cavern, which has a platform near the water's surface. Ignore the shark; he's not terribly hungry.

In the private lounge, look on the bar for a switch by a cup of coffee. Pulling it opens a door nearby. In the office with the fancy chair, push the button on its right arm. Use your code breaker on the safe that is revealed, then exit the door to the helicopter pad.

A Very Large Explosion, Scene 1

In the room with the fireplace, look for a grating near the floor in one corner of the room. After you fight the first of the three mod women, look for a tilted picture in one of the upstairs hallways; use it to open a secret panel. To the left is *the Bacalov Corrector*; to the right is a room with a fireplace. A button in the fireplace allows you into the blue room. To the left of the bed is a panel in the wall that opens when you use it.

To get down to the friendly soldier, use the nearby lift (a switch on the wall raises the lift to you). After you fight the pair of women in the courtyard, climb a leaning beam up to the awning and follow it around to the far corner; a damaged portion allows you to drop down and end the scene.

A Very Large Explosion, Scene 2

When the helicopters shoot at you, take cover behind the sides of the gondola. Shoot the gunners who fire at you from the open helicopter doors. Shooting the rotors of a helicopter will also down it. White Phosphorous ammunition works wonders here. When the gondola stops, use your zipcord to gain access to the nearby cable tower.

To kill Volkov, you must reach the gun shown to you in the cutscene. Shoot him while using the ice pillars for cover.

Such is the Nature of Revenge, Scene 1

To get civilians off the streets, approach them and hit the use key on them. You can do this even if you are holding a gun. All civilians are on the ground level, and are not hidden (although one fellow is standing on a little deck behind a tree, and is easy to miss at first).

Such is the Nature of Revenge, Scene 2

When you battle Goodman, look for armor and boxes of bullets around the area. Watch out for his grenades if you get close, but do get close; it's the best way to get your licks in. Now swallow a couple of aspirin and try to keep track of the twists and turns in the final cutscene.

—Dave Perkins

Take that! And that! And that! After Hercules beats Ares' pet up, you can finally quarry marble.

Once his sanctuary is complete, Ares and his dragon take frequent strolls around Thebes.

Zeus: Master of Olympus

The gods must be crazy: navigating the treacherous waters with ease

ZEUS: MASTER OF OLYMPUS PLAYS QUITE DIFFERENTLY FROM PAST IMPRESSIONS titles. Its much-simplified approach to city design allows even casual gamers to build thriving metropolises with a little practice. Zeus' campaigns present you with a number of puzzle-like problems, however. This tips piece should enable you to navigate their treacherous waters with ease.

Zeus and Europa

This introductory campaign still offers a number of interesting challenges. In the first scenario, you should found the city of Thebes to the east of the river. A massive lava flow in the sixth scenario will destroy much of the land on the west bank, making it a rather unhealthy place to build homes. Lots of wolves live near the big northeastern meadow, so use it for wheat farming and place your vulnerable sheep and goats in the central meadow instead. Exportation of fleece will keep your economy healthy. Ignore the marble quarry for now—the Hydra will kill every worker who approaches.

You can summon Hercules in the second scenario, but only after your allies gift you a great deal of wine. Be sure to build storehouses to accept both the wine and any sculpture they offer, which will be useful later. After Hercules kills the Hydra, build 5 masonry shops near the quarry to meet your marble production goals and start exporting marble for additional cash.

Winning the third scenario is simple if you've accepted previous gifts of sculpture. Your marble output (and the sculpture gifts) will be more than sufficient to build Ares' sanctuary while continuing exportation of this valuable commodity. Note that odd numbers of artisan guilds are most efficient at sanctuary construction. Placing the marble tiles is the slowest stage, and an odd number of guilds summons as many marble-hauling sledges as the next

Note that two of the three trireme wharves in this screenshot have no workers. At 100 employees each, it's often best to leave the ships unmanned.

The southeastern corner of Cydonia can produce every resource you need to win.

Uh oh. An angry Poseidon smashes Argos' fishing industry.

Summoning Theseus is a pain. This stuck-up "hero" insists on living next to the palace in a very high appeal area.

highest even number while working just as quickly.

In scenario four, you found your first colony at Cydonia, which must produce 30 wood and 30 wine to win. Do *not* get distracted by Talos—just ignore him when he attacks. Talos will only roam the north side of the land, and building a city strong enough to summon Jason and beat the monster is not worth your time. Found your colony in the safe southeast instead and quickly accumulate your goal items.

You return to Thebes for the fifth scenario, where you should quickly construct a sanctuary to Artemis for its free warriors. Talos is coming, and he will annihilate your marble industry, so hurry. Summoning Jason to kill him will be costly—you'll need three triremes, eight horses, two companies of horsemen, and 64 food. Selling armor is a good way to earn the cash you'll need, especially once marble production ceases. Don't forget to send trireme dockworkers home when the ships aren't fighting. At 100 employees each, they consume incredible amounts of labor.

In scenario six, build a sanctuary to Athena in preparation for coming episodes. Conquering Mt. Chaeron will be a breeze when you dispatch the free troops Ares and Artemis provide in addition to your own forces. The infamous lava flow occurs in this scenario.

The seventh scenario requires you to build some additional housing just west of the river to reach your goal of 4000 people. Don't go too far west, though, as Maenads will attack anything near the lava flow. Achilles can quickly be summoned to fight them if you built Athena's sanctuary in scenario six, although the 32 armor he demands cost a fortune to produce.

The final scenario should be an easy win. Build Aphrodite's sanctuary since it's the fastest to construct. The required fighting will be simple with your free troops, horsemen, and triremes, and Hephaestus' attack is no danger with gods like Athena protecting your city.

Perseus and Medusa

Mistakes that you make in the original scenario of this campaign will cost you later. Build Argos' first housing blocks in the south-center of the map. Keep your granaries well inland from the fisheries that supply them, or watch them be destroyed by Poseidon's tidal waves in the second and third scenarios. When you build your palace, be sure to leave significant amounts of open space nearby for Theseus' hall (which you'll need in scenario six). Otherwise, you'll have to tear the palace down and move it. Once the allied city of Troezan is founded, you can export fleece to meet your profit goals and win.

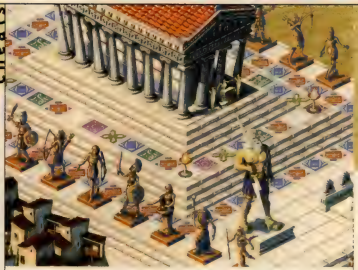
In the second scenario, an angry Poseidon will attack and destroy your essential fisheries again and again. Keep rebuilding them and try to maintain a good supply of food in your (safe) inland granaries to feed your people during his assaults. Begin a sanctuary to Zeus (who will defeat Poseidon once it's finished) as soon as you can, but don't expect to complete it in this scenario. Instead, set aside the resources you need for your colony and move on. Finally, be sure to make room in your warehouses for valuable bronze gifts from Troezan, which will help produce the many expensive sculptures you'll need.

Choose Miletos for your first colony—your empire will gain access to more important resources more quickly this way, and Ethiopia will join you automatically when the Kraken dies. Site your city to the west, fairly near the ore deposits and boars. Build Athena's sanctuary first (for the olive groves) and then construct one to Hermes so you can summon Perseus. You'll have to survive quite a while with the Kraken in your city before you can send for him, and the beast will cut off waterborne trade. Request marble and fleece from your trading partners to maintain your housing and complete the sanctuaries; gift them money and wood in return to keep them happy. It's weird but true—while the Kraken sinks trading ships, gifts just magically appear in your warehouses.

The fourth scenario sends you back to Argos. Your newly expanded empire will provide the raw materials you need to complete Zeus' sanctuary and get rid of Poseidon. Next, build sanctuaries to Athena and Hermes so you can summon Perseus (again). Three temples sacrifice a lot of sheep, so keep replacing them. While tribute should provide all the wood you need, import bronze. Boost your population to 2000 or more before winning.

Building Zeus' immense sanctuary takes a long time and is very, very costly.

Your second colony will be at Calydon. Site the city near the boars, woods, and pastureland. Lots of marble (which you'll need for your Hermes sanctuary) will be gifted by Argos, so be sure to have the necessary storage space. If you complete the temple before the Calydonian Boar arrives, Hermes might kill it for you. The Boar attacks everything it encounters, including gods. However, leave open space near your palace in case they don't run into one another and you have to summon Theseus to deal with it instead. Finally, don't neglect your wine industry. It's the key to a profitable colony.



Now that Zeus' sanctuary towers over Argos, no other god will dare to attack.

Placing armories, foundries, and warehouses close together maximizes armor production.

The campaign ends at Argos. Construct a temple to Dionysus, which will provide the grapes you'll otherwise have to import. Be sure to consult with the oracle at Zeus' temple each year—you'll get many month's advance warning of Medusa's approach and can have Perseus in town and ready to fight. You'll also need the services of Theseus, so don't build in the open space near your palace. Victory should be easy to achieve.

The Voyages of Jason

This short campaign offers an interesting economic challenge—you can't collect taxes for the first three scenarios. If you don't develop extensive export industries, you'll quickly go bankrupt. In the first scenario, wood should be your chief export, supplemented by excess fleece. Found your city of Iolcus near the north road. Pastureland is limited, so fish in addition to farming. The wine you need to summon Hercules will come as gifts. Stymphalus, a hostile rival city, will make repeated large demands. Ignore them. They won't invade for a long time, and it's far cheaper to bribe their army once than to give them what they want.

The second scenario requires you to import massive quantities of marble to summon Theseus and begin work on a sanctuary to Athena. You probably can't complete the sanctuary before Theseus kills the Calydonian boar and completes an overseas quest, but that's fine. Win quickly and move on.

In the third scenario your erstwhile enemy Stymphalus has a change of heart and becomes your ally. They'll buy fleece and wheat, giving a needed boost to your economy. Finish Athena's sanctuary quickly—it's impossible to summon Jason without elite housing, and the sanctuary is your only possible source of olive oil. As usual, build and then unman the triremes that are also required for Jason.

My, what a big axe you have!

Large land battles can get kind of messy.

Choose Corinth for your colony, as Iolcus has no real need for the additional agricultural resources Corcyra provides. Finally, you can tax. Found your city near the center of the map and quickly create wood and armor industries. Many requests for both will arrive soon, and you can export any excess for lots of cash. Six armories and foundries running full blast will meet your goal of 36 armor produced in one year. Lemnos, a hostile rival nearby, will make outrageous demands. Ignore them and fight or bribe the armies to come.

The final, easy scenario sends you back to Iolcus, where you can also tax. Your money woes are now over. The only "challenging" goal in this scenario is constructing a sanctuary to Zeus, and that just takes time.

Athens through the Ages

This long campaign is probably Zeus' best. Athens' lack of resources will force you to build a strong empire to survive. In the first scenario, goats will be your only industry. Build your city near the extensive pastureland to the northwest where you'll graze your herd, but not too close—the Minotaur will attack its eastern edge. Replace any goats the monster destroys. When Minos invades, buy him off repeatedly.

The second scenario allows you to summon Theseus and destroy that pesky Minotaur, but be warned that importing the goods you need to attract the hero will cause your finances to plummet. Keep a close eye on your cash. The wood and armor that you'll need to build a trireme and recruit four hoplites will be gifted to your city, along with a little olive oil. Save the oil until you are ready to create elite housing, then move quickly against Knossos. If you run out of oil, your housing will devolve, you'll lose your hoplites, and you won't be able to win.

Pick Amphipolis as your first colony (Athens badly needs its wood, bronze, and marble). The east side of the river in this easy scenario has every resource you need. Sell marble and import fleece, but don't bother to develop your housing beyond that point. A population of 700 or so will provide enough employees for the essential industries. A centaur force is likely to attack just before you win. Bribe them and move on.

The tough fourth scenario returns you to Athens for war with

Athena's sanctuary is the only way many cities can produce their own olive oil.

With his curses, plagues, and arrows, Apollo can really make a mess of your home.

It's nice to have Poseidon on your side for a change.

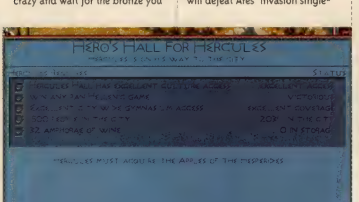
Persia. Victory will require three triremes, rule of Sardis and Delos, and some housing goals that are easy to achieve once oil becomes available. When you meet requests from Olympias, they will start exporting this critical resource. After you build Hermes' sanctuary, sell your tribute marble for essential extra cash. Expand your elite housing fast—you'll need about 40 hoplites to win. Sardis is likely to conquer Delos before your military is strong enough to stop them, but don't panic. Just keep meeting allied requests for military aid and, when you can spare the troops, conquer Mt. Pelion and its valuable armor supply. Then retake Delos. When Sparta and Cornith both betray you, conquer them too (Sparta's tribute of 12 armor a year is particularly helpful). Finally, it's Sardis' turn. In this and future scenarios, taxation and tribute (of cash and items that you need or can sell) are the keys to your economy.

Create your second colony at Laurion. Your large empire makes this an extremely simple scenario. Sell tribute marble to Delos and buy fish from them in return. Don't import any fleece, as it will be gifted. Just mine silver like crazy and wait for the bronze you need to come as tribute. You should win in three years.

Scenario six sends you back to Athens, where Corinth and Sparta will be independent rivals very briefly before allying with you. Eretria will be conquered by the Persians (don't worry about this) and then join you voluntarily as a vassal once you meet enough requests from your allies. While you await this development, boost your population to about 4000, build a fourth trireme, and expand your elite housing until you have 64 hoplites. Send your entire force to attack Hattusas. They are likely to counterattack you the moment your army leaves, and for some unknown reason their troops are faster than yours. Bribe the enemy since you'll have no defenses, then wait for your army to conquer Hattusas and win the scenario.

The seventh scenario is ridiculously easy. Build a sanctuary to Apollo immediately and he will slay the attacking dragon for you (there's no need to summon Jason). You should effortlessly meet the other goals.

You can finally build a sanctuary to Athena in scenario eight and stop importing olive oil. If you complete it quickly enough, she will defeat Ares' invasion single-handedly. Better still, Apollo will destroy both Cerberus and the Minotaur for you, but you'll have to summon Hercules to complete an overseas quest. Build a couple horse ranches and convert most of your hoplites to horsemen so that you can meet your elite housing goal and win the campaign.



You'll see this a lot in the "Labors of Hercules" campaign.

Don't worry about building bridges for your heroes. If they need to cross a river, they build their own rafts.

Burning down the housing! An angry Hephaestus heats things up.

The Labors of Hercules

This long and varied campaign offers a number of interesting challenges, but not in the simple first scenario. Found Tiryns near the eastern shore and invest in a strong fleece industry, which you'll export to Cyme. There's nothing you can do to help Cyme when it's attacked, but don't be concerned. While Cyme will briefly stop importing fleece, it soon resumes trade and fills your coffers for an easy win.

Choosing a colony site in scenario two is difficult, as they are all useful. Lerna might be the best choice, however, since its olive oil tribute will help you throughout the campaign. Found the city on the west bank of the river and construct bridges to the pastures to the east. The Hydra will appear far to the south and leave you completely alone unless you build near it, which there's no good reason to do. Even if it does cause problems, you will probably summon Hercules long before the monster arrives (he has a quest to perform), and he'll dispatch the Hydra as soon as it attacks.

You return to a beleaguered Tiryns in the third scenario. Initially, a Kraken will invade. You'll have to build sanctuaries to both Hermes and Athena to summon Perseus to save you. Mt. Pelion will sell the marble and bronze your sanctuaries need while buying more fleece from you. Note that you must export every possible scrap of fleece in this scenario to avoid going broke. Boosting your city's population to 1500-2000 for the added

Athena and Talos make quick work of an invading Trojan army.

"Dad! Wait! Can't we talk about this?" An angry Zeus teaches his son Ares not to invade other gods' cities.

taxation revenue will also help, as will some small gifts of marble. Apollo will also assault your city in this scenario, and while Athena may chase him off once you finish her sanctuary, he's still likely to cause serious damage with plague, curses, and outright destruction. Try to have some excess population to avoid employment problems and a good cash reserve to repair damage. Once you summon Perseus and kill the Kraken, this tough scenario ends.

Select Ephesus as your second colony. Produce and sell massive quantities of bronze and import 10 fleece a year to upgrade your housing (olive oil tribute from Lerna provides enough of that resource). Requests from allied cities and summoning Hercules will require a lot of wine. Ask your neighbors for as much as you can, and import the rest with the profits from your bronze industry. Not a difficult scenario.

When you return to Tiryns in scenario five, begin construction of a sanctuary to Zeus. You probably won't finish it yet, but starting it now will be a big help later on. Cyme, Mt. Malea, and Mt. Pelion will all become rivals in this scenario, so make up for their lost trading income by building a pier to Ephesus, which will buy fleece and olive oil. Conquering any of your new rivals without winning the scenario is impossible. You can't avoid meeting your victory conditions as you assemble an army large enough for the job, so postpone your vengeance until a later scenario. Finally, be certain you can accept any gifts of armor your allies offer. You won't be able to make or import any in the future, and you'll need a lot.

Lemnos will be your final colony, and it will provide a nice marble tribute to help finish your Zeus sanctuary. Site your initial housing blocks on the large northeastern island. Sea urchins are close by, and food is not the problem that the scenario briefing claims. Building there will also avoid damage from Hephaestus' first attack. Mining silver will profitably employ your people while you construct a sanctuary to Aphrodite. Don't dally—an angry Poseidon will also invade before many years pass. Build an extra granary or two and fill it with food before he arrives. Finally, note that you'll have to erect some additional housing blocks on another island or the mainland to meet your population requirements.

You return to Tiryns for the final scenario. The challenge here is armor—you need a lot of it, but it's not available for import and you can't make it either. Be sure you accept all gifts. Also, let Athena and your rabble destroy every invading army that attacks instead of risking your hoplites and their irreplaceable armor. You'll need about 50 warriors to successfully attack Mt. Pelion, so boost your city's total population to 4000 and expand elite housing. Finally, once the Zeus sanctuary is complete, rampaging enemy gods are (at long last) not an issue.

The Peleponnesian War

This short campaign is much simpler than the description would lead you to believe. Found Sparta near the river in the center of the map. Exporting wheat to Thermopylae and sculpture to Cornith will prove very profitable. Note that enough fleece will be gifted to your city that no importation will be needed to meet your housing goal.

In the second scenario, import oil and marble from Athens and sell them wheat. Don't delay sanctuary construction—Athens will eventually stop trading with you, but you can almost buy enough marble first. Request what you can't buy. After you complete Ares' sanctuary, build one to Artemis as well. You'll need her troops in addition to Ares' forces to conquer Olympia. Bribe Olympia when they invade you early in the scenario, boost your population to around 2000, and then attack when both sanctuaries are complete.

By the end of the third scenario, Sparta will be a real power. Your first action here should be to conquer Delos for its grapes tribute and trade. You'll need wine to meet elite housing goals, and you can sell any excess that you produce for a very good price. Cash flow is especially important here since you'll have to convert most of your sculpture industry to armor production. Try to build sanctuaries to both Apollo and Hephaestus, though you'll probably have to import marble at a slower rate than in the second scenario. Requesting it whenever your reputation is high will help. Don't worry about aiding Corinth's attack on Sardis. Even if your help enables Corinth to win, Sardis will still be a rival. Instead, equip 30 to 40 hoplites, dispatch your colony provisions, and move on.

In scenario four, found a colony at Ithaca, which is tougher but more fun than Toras. Build most of your common housing on the northeastern island and, later, develop elite housing on the island southwest of the marble quarry. Construct a pier to Sparta nearby and sell marble/buy armor. Build another pier to Olympia near your common housing and import fleece and olives while selling additional marble. Sardis will attack before you're ready to fight them, so buy them off. Sadly,

Even though thrown rocks are their only weapons, large rabble forces can still do well in combat.

Scylla will plague your city for a long time before you can summon Odysseus, so patiently rebuild coastal structures as needed. The Cyclops, however, will never be a threat, as it attacks an island you won't occupy. Request as much wine as you can (for Odysseus and your elite housing) and import the rest. Once he arrives, victory is easy. After Odysseus kills the monsters, send him, your hoplites, and a couple of Triremes to reconquer Delos and score a victory.

The final scenario of this campaign sends you back to Sparta for a very quick win. Send the troops you recruited in scenario three to conquer Athens immediately, as it attacks your early and often otherwise. Then take out Amphipolis and Eretria. While your troops are ravaging Greece, build a single horse ranch, which will be enough to boost your elite housing to the highest levels. You should win in one to two years.

The Trojan War

This tough campaign rewards patience and careful planning. In the first scenario, found your city of Aulis near the water on the larger land mass. Build bridges to the smaller one and use its pastures for wheat farming. Sheep should be raised in the southwestern meadows since there are no wolves there. Four of your allies will buy fleece, and there are also good markets for your oil and wine. Export your way to a fortune while boosting Aulis' population to about 2000 and building a sanctuary to Poseidon. Don't meet the easy victory conditions until you've done both.

Ethiopia and Miletos will both become rivals early in the second scenario. Quickly import all the bronze you can from them to make the armor you need to win. If you can't purchase enough bronze, you'll have to buy expensive armor from Sparta instead. Go ahead and construct a sanctuary to Hermes and a couple of triremes while meeting your goals. You can win in one or two years if you built a strong city in the first episode.

Found your first colony at Pergamum. Tenedos has no resources at all (not even food!) and it's better to wait before tackling it. The ideal site for your city is the middle plateau where your wheat, sheep, and bronze industries will all be located. There's enough room here for your city and both sanctuaries if you're careful, and goods deliveries will be much quicker if everything is close together. Place your housing in the far western corner of the plateau, Athena's sanctuary to the northeast, and Zeus' sanctuary to the southeast. Very large gifts will get your city off to a fast start, so be sure to build enough storage facilities to accept them all. Export fleece and armor and import the marble you need for sanctuary construction. Build Athena's first for oil production and the protection she provides to your city. Once it's finished, you won't have to fight or bribe repeated Trojan attacks—Athena will slaughter them for you. Artemis is likely to invade just before you complete Athena's sanctuary. Use your rabble to kill her Amazons after the goddess gets bored and leaves.

You return to Aulis for the fourth scenario, where elite housing and offensive military action are now possible. Build three triremes and 40 hoplites and go to war. Conquer every rival on the map except Troy and Lyrnessus, neither of which can fall to you yet. Your new vassals will provide very useful tribute in the upcoming scenarios, and Cyme in particular will be your only possible source of wood—when Odysseus completes his quest, Ithaca will collapse and stop trading with you. Only after your conquests are complete should you meet the goods requirements for your next colony and win.

Now it's time to found a colony at Tenedos, which boasts a complete lack of resources. The open land to the east will be repeatedly attacked, so build your city near the beach instead. Big early gifts mean that storage is your top labor priority. You'll have to import food, fleece, olives, grapes, wood, and bronze and craft finished goods. Sell any excess armor, wine, and oil that you produce to stay solvent. Don't bother to build triremes in this scenario—no waterborne attacks are coming, and your rivals aren't accessible by sea. Construct a sanctuary to Athena as quickly as you can for olives and city defense, then build one to Hephaestus so that you can summon Achilles and call upon the services of Talos. Thankfully, Achilles should arrive before Hector invades. While you'll have to bribe the first Trojan attacks, you can fight the later ones with Athena, Talos, Achilles, and your troops. After you've recruited 60 hoplites, wait for your spies to report that Lyrnessus military has weakened. Then attack them and win.

The final scenario sends you back to Aulis. Aside from the conquest of Troy, all of your goals should already be met if you did well in the fourth scenario. Build a sanctuary to Athena to strengthen your army, boost your navy to four or five triremes, and recruit 70 to 80 hoplites. Again, wait for your spies to report military weakness, then attack Troy and win an easy victory over a difficult campaign. —*Dave Markell*

Common housing provides homes for your city's most important residents, the workers. This rectangular block serves their needs well.

You'd never guess that there are 24 sheep in that little patch of pasture. Placing them in small, isolated sections of the meadow makes the shepherds' job very easy, since they can't wander away.

Elite housing requires very high appeal. Note all the commemorative monuments, columns, and hedge mazes.

Leading wolves into an ambush.

The Dirty Half-Dozen.

Scratch one clueless badguy.

Fallout Tactics

Interplay's apocalyptic bungle in the wasteland

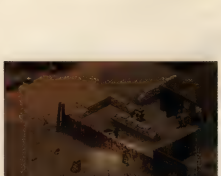
It might well be the ultimate squad-based tactical game—at least for fans of the *Jagged Alliance* and *X-Com* series. Consider a game with the playability and character detail from the well-received role-playing, *Fallout*, and then give it a full-out tactical makeover. Consider *Fallout: Tactics*. The game's backstory will take place between the events of the original *Fallout* and those of *Fallout 2*. The plot follows one of the wasteland's various war-like factions, the Brotherhood of Steel, in a new part of the country. The action will begin in the Chicago area and gradually expand to include larger sections of a now devastated United States.

Unlike previous *Fallout* titles, *Tactics* will be primarily mission-based. The single player version includes 38 missions, of which 20 are required, with 18 that are optional. The game is divided into five chapters, and in each one you'll have some control over which missions you wish to play. Your actions within a mission will affect events later in the game, possibly even triggering one or more of the optional missions. For example, highly undesirable consequences may occur if you annoy a faction in an early mission. It will be advisable to avoid rubbing potential allies the wrong way, lest they start shrugging and toeing the dirt when you need a helping hand.

Despite this new direction, *Fallout: Tactics* remains a legitimate part of the *Fallout* universe. In place of the familiar role-playing party, you'll instead be leading a squad of six heavily armed characters into glorious post-apocalyptic combat. Your characters may now go prone, crawl, or crouch for a better shot. The game introduces a host of new factors to combat, including height elevations—you'll be able to hide on rooftops to snipe or drop grenades. Your team will have access to a variety of vehicles in battle. Your characters can drive, serve as a gunner, or just catch a ride. When fighting other vehicles you can target your shots, aiming at things like the wheels or the driver.

Another interesting change is the addition of multiplayer support. Now six players can do battle, each controlling six characters in what is sure to be a massive excuse for mayhem. The game has also gone real-time... sort of. *Fallout: Tactics* uses a continuous turn-based system. Game play is real-time, but actions such as running or firing expend action points that are replenished over time. This should result in a less frenzied real-time experience more analogous to combat in *Baldur's Gate* than, say, to that in *Myth*. In most ways, *Tactics* tones down the series' role-playing elements, although the game will still include dialogue and an involved storyline. Trading and bartering will also add some dimension to the overall experience.

It's a return visit to the wastelands, but this time you're going loaded for mutated bear and the bears are armed, rather surly, and very hungry. The demo includes a tutorial set and two missions. Lock and load!



Badguys go down!

THE GOODS

GENRE Tactical Squad Based Strategy

PUBLISHER Interplay

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 266, 64MB RAM

INSTALL SIZE 135MB

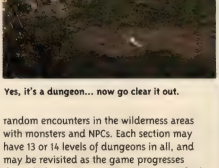
Leveling up after a melee massacre.

Diablo II

It's an action game. It's an RPG. It's two treats in one.

The *Diablo II* juggernaut rolled over the world last summer and you've yet to partake of its diabolical sweetness. "Gimme a demo," you say. "Try before buy, that's my motto." Okay, so the demo is here. What's it like? Played the original back in 1995? Well, it's like *Diablo*, but more so. It's faster, you can move and fire in any direction, characters are more customizable, the world is bigger, there are new character classes, and playing online now includes all the quests and conversations of the single-player game in addition to being far more cheat-proof than mulitplayer games with the original.

Want more? *Diablo II* introduces new heroes in five different classes who will attempt to put an end to the reign of nastiness. Players will progress through four "Acts" in the game, each of which will take place in a multi-sectored area. The layout here is much larger than *Diablo's* original playing area. If you think of all of Tristram as being one "square," then six to eight of these squares adjacent to one another will compose each of the new town areas. The general town areas will include only one real town section (in which you will be invulnerable to attack) in addition to wilderness sections, monster inhabited towers or abandoned caves and the like. There will be



Yes, it's a dungeon... now go clear it out.

random encounters in the wilderness areas with monsters and NPCs. Each section may have 13 or 14 levels of dungeons in all, and may be revisited as the game progresses through the Acts. For instance, you may find a locked area in Act I, for which you may get a key or opening incantation in a future Act. You will then be able to revisit the original act and enter the new area.

The game is still a bit shallow and it's still only a borderline RPG. And it mostly boils down to killing things and scarfing up goodies. But, like the first game, it's immensely addictive and incredibly fun. The fact that the game is much larger this time around, with a lot more "stuff" to acquire, only means that those who camped out in front of their *Diablo* playing monitors for a month will find the *Diablo II* jones even more difficult to kick. The demo whets your appetite by allowing you to experience Act I and two quests. Now and go forth and kill some monsters.

THE GOODS

GENRE Action/Role-playing

PUBLISHER Blizzard Entertainment

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 233, 32MB RAM

INSTALL SIZE 131MB

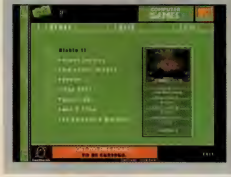
CGCD-ROM INSTALLATION

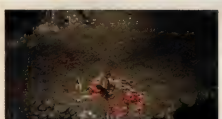
Welcome to the Computer Games CD-ROM (CGCD). To install the demos, place the CD in your CD-ROM drive and the CGCD PDA interface will automatically load. Maximizing the CGCD window will allow the interface to fill your screen.

To access the demos, click on the "Demos" icon. Click the CD icon next to the game you want to install. Additional materials—Trailers, the latest version of DirectX (which some games require)—can be found by clicking on the "Etc." icon.

If the CD fails to Autoplay, double click on "My Computer," double-click your CD-ROM drive (usually drive "D") and then double click the CGCD executable file (CGCD.EXE). If you're still having problems, please send a description of the problem along with your system configuration to cgcdtech@cdmag.com, or mail a letter with the same information to the address below. If you have a defective CD-ROM, a replacement can be obtained by sending the original CD to:

Computer Games
63 Millet St.
Richmond, VT 05477
ATTN: CD replacement





I'm not cleaning this up!

Fate of the Dragon

"Age of Three Kingdoms"

Here's a lofty concept... take one of the greatest classical Chinese novels about the post Han Dynasty era, *Three Kingdoms*, and wrap a real-time strategy game (*a la Age of Empires II*) around it. The novel, by Luo Guanzhong (circa 1300 AD), is considered as important for Chinese culture as the Homeric epics have been for the West. This fourteenth-century masterpiece continues to be loved and read throughout China today. *Three Kingdoms*, the novel and game, portrays a fateful moment at the end of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) when the future of the Chinese empire lay in the balance. Fearing attacks by three rebellious states, the emperor sent out an urgent appeal for support. In response, three young men—the aristocratic Liu Xuande, the fugitive Lord Guan, and the pig butcher Zhang Fei—met to swear eternal brotherhood and fealty to their beleaguered country. Their vow set in motion the series of events that ultimately resulted in the collapse of the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD).

Some of the features you can look forward to include the establishment of comprehensive power through production, construction, trade, science and technology, alliances and war. Multiple paths to victory—military control through war and strategic deployment, economic control through trade and the development of new technologies, or political control through diplomacy and strategic alliances. Each of the three kingdoms contains unique technologies, buildings, and characters uniquely modeled from the actual technological, cultural and social development of the time.

The demo allows you to play a training mission and two campaign scenarios.

Surveying his domain.

Not even walls can stop us...

THE GOODS

GENRE Real Time Strategy

PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 166, 32MB RAM

INSTALL SIZE 110MB

SWAT 3 Elite Edition

Breach, bang and clear! In a nightclub. With guns

SWAT 3: Elite Edition is basically an updated and multiplayer capable version of 1999's *SWAT 3 Close Quarters Battle*. While the game bears a superficial resemblance to *Rainbow Six*, it is soon apparent that the gameplay sports a number of subtle differences. The game can be played in mission mode (stand-alone scenarios) or career mode. In career mode the player will follow a branching path of missions in which the story unfolds based on the outcome of the last mission. The game does not feature any strategic planning and plays closer to the *Half-Life* modification *Counter-Strike* than the *Rainbow Six* series.

Real SWAT members often have only a general idea of what the situation is when they enter a close quarters environment, and the game strives to mirror that. Pre-missions briefings will give the player any available intelligence, such as the number of known suspects or hostages, and perhaps the general layout of the building. The player will be able to equip a five-man element with a variety of weapons and equipment used by real SWAT teams, and then choose how to enter the area. After the player makes entry the real game starts, and the emphasis of the game shifts to quickly assessing the situation, securing the area, and apprehending any potential suspects. This demo features single-player, deathmatch and cooperative online play. In the demo mission, you lead a LAPD SWAT element through a high-risk warrant service in a downtown nightclub. Your mission objective is to arrest four suspects wanted in a home invasion incident. Go at it alone with four AI-driven officers at your side or go online for five person cooperative play. The *SWAT 3: Elite Edition* demo features all the weapons and multiplayer features found in the full version. Gameplay is limited to the nightclub mission.

Breaching and clearing—nice mirror reflection!

Element stacked and ready to go.

THE GOODS

GENRE Tactical Squad Based Shooter

PUBLISHER Sierra

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 300, 64MB RAM, 3D Accelerator

INSTALL SIZE 100MB

Project IGI: I'm Goin' In

THE GOODS

GENRE First Person Shooter

PUBLISHER Eidos

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 300, 64MB RAM, 3D Accelerator

INSTALL SIZE 77MB

You're Jones, ex-SAS, and you've got a dirty counter-terrorist job to do. It'll take stealth, steady nerves, and a bit of luck. Go forth and make the world safe for democracy.

Gunman Chronicles

THE GOODS

GENRE First-Person Action

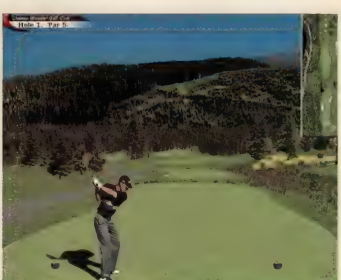
PUBLISHER Sierra

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 233, 32MB RAM, 3D Accelerator

INSTALL SIZE 141MB

Cowboys in space! Alien outlaws are messing up the DNA in the Western Spiral Arm of the galaxy and you're the new sheriff in the quadrant. Killing bad guys and dinosaurs makes for hot bloody work. Keep your head down and your powder dry, pardner!

Links 2001



THE GOODS

GENRE Golf

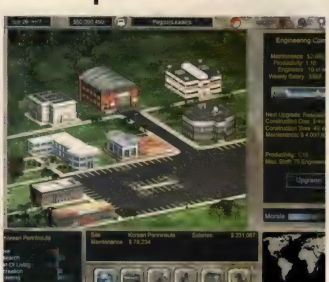
PUBLISHER Microsoft

REQUIREMENTS Pentium II 266, 64MB RAM

INSTALL SIZE 69MB

Arnie is back in the newest version of the venerable golf simulation, updated with spiffy graphics, powerful course designer, and a wealth of new options. Perfect for when your favorite real life course is buried beneath snow drifts.

The Corporate Machine



THE GOODS

GENRE Strategy

PUBLISHER Stardock

REQUIREMENTS Pentium 100, 16MB RAM, Internet Connection

INSTALL SIZE 74MB

In this sequel to Entrepreneur, you start a company and must conquer the world. How do you do it? Simple—just spread your corporate empire throughout the world into every facet of everyday life and eliminate your competitors. This CGM exclusive (and expanded) demo is online only.

eBay Underground

It's all about the stuff

by Cindy Yans

In mid-January, Verant Interactive took steps to put a stop to the purchase and sale of *EverQuest* items on eBay. So farewell to the characters and items that had been available via that particular, shall we say "fence?" Oh. Except for that Solusek Ro Shaman account for $11.99, or that Solusek Ro Ranger account for $26.00, or that Fennin Ro 47th level Ranger at $600.00, or that level 51 Shadowknight complete with Dark Elf transition, and Journeyman's Boots for $500.00. The most costly item is a level 57 Bard at $1025.00—a bargain.

Okay, after Verant's latest attempt at a ban, eBay removed thousands of *EverQuest* items from its available auctions. Of the 154 related items listed at this writing (a little over a week after the ban), about half of them are for the boxed game itself, or one of its add-ons. The other half are still for characters, in-game currency, and items. Verant took this action because of staunch protests from dedicated customers who believe that the purchase and sale of these goods is very debilitating to game balance.

I have been swimming in opinion threads on bulletin boards discussing this issue. Most eBay supporters, several of whom have begun a class action suit against Sony, Verant, and eBay, indicate that what they are selling is actually their time—namely the time it took to acquire the item, or build the character. They state that no one has the right to prohibit the sale of their time. In fact, several of the existing auctions overtly state, "what you are bidding on and purchasing is solely my time." *Au contraire.* eBay has stated from day one that it protects third parties from infringement upon illegal distribution of their property or copyrighted materials.

In its Verified Rights Owner Program, eBay notes, "We are committed to removing infringing or unlicensed items once an authorized representative of the rights owner properly reports them to us." Verant, as the owner of the intellectual properties (we players rather "rent them" as part of our End-User agreement), is well within its rights to prohibit eBay from carrying stolen mithril cloaks and the like. Sellers who say that their time is the only thing for sale, and that the item is simply "given" are mistakenly self-justifying. Could they sell the time it took them to reproduce copyrighted materials such as films, books, music, etc. and throw in the materials for free? Of course not.

> ***Several of the existing auctions overtly state, 'What you are bidding on and purchasing is solely my time.' Au contraire.***

People have begun to "go underground" to continue the sale and acquisition of such items. There is a listing on eBay for information, priced at $0.01. The information is a link to another site that formed a few days after the latest ban, where the buying and selling are merrily continuing. Trying to enforce this or any similar type of ban is a logistical nightmare. So however it must, the practice will continue.

The sad part about all of this is that while it's not surprising that capitalistic pursuits have grown from the farming of "stuff," it is a shame, somehow, that for the buyer-players-who-are-not-resellers it's not about role-playing or adventuring, it's all about "the stuff." The culprit? The persistent universe.

Some years ago, the idea of persistence in role-playing games was extremely attractive and intriguing. However, the characteristic of persistence when extended to the gameworld at large necessitates that "the stuff" is way more important than "the story." Every session, your 35th (or whatever) level character spawns wherever you left it, the same NPCs are there, and they say the same inane things to you. You kill the same Monsters, which respawn at regular intervals. Nothing you do affects the world in any way. There are no consequences to your actions, and one day is like the next, as you meet new Monsters in the Next Survivable Area all having been killed already by the last batch of level 35s.

The worlds are charming and lovely, often breathtaking, and it goes without saying that the social aspect of such games is hands down their biggest appeal. And they are, without a doubt, quite addictive. But what if we could have all of those things in a world where actions had consequences...where perhaps death was permanent but not necessarily punishing...where there was an episodic, intermittently finite storyline in a world that is changeable but infinite? Without those qualities, when your actions have no effect on the story (if there even is one), then it *is* all about "the stuff."

"Sure, *you* go make something like that work," says the knowing developer. Surely someone is trying... Oh wait, make that 162 eBay items, and climbing. ■

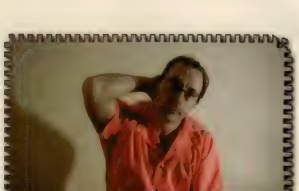
It is written, the wise know when to cheat.

The wise also know not to get cheats from some old dude living in a hut. The most up-to-date cheats, reviews, and demos for games on every platform are all free for the taking at happypuppy.com. It's great for regular gamers, drunken masters, and even old dudes living in huts.

happypuppy.com
it's all games

gamestheglobe.com

"I'm a prophet"



Our exclusive interview with the ISDMA gunman

by Tom Chick

As most of you already know, the 2000 ISDMA awards ceremony in Menlo City's Atari Pavilion was temporarily suspended when a lone gunman took the stage and held police at bay for nearly four hours. At the time of this writing, Yossarian Wortzik was awaiting arraignment in the Santa Mateo county jail on $50,000 bail. By contacting his lawyer, we were able to secure an interview. Although we refused to submit a written list of questions in advance of the interview, Wortzik's lawyer gave us a list of topics were weren't allowed to discuss.

Among the prohibited topics were the details of the actual incident, so we'll briefly recap them here. As the Gaming God Award was being presented to Ion Storm's Stevie Case, a young man sprang from the audience, wielding what appeared to be a pistol (the Menlo City police department report indicates this was an interact light gun with the cord coiled up and hidden in Wortzik's sleeve). According to witnesses, Wortzik announced the exits had been blocked and no one would be allowed to leave. The police were alerted and they arrived on the scene to establish contact with Wortzik and conduct negotiations. Almost four hours later, he turned himself in to police.

Wortzik's background is sketchy. An online search revealed a number of game reviews he had written for various fan sites. Most of the reviews were pulled shortly after the incident, but what we found clearly demonstrated a man with unconventional tastes. He had very few positive things to say about some of last year's top selling games. He seemed overly critical, perhaps even angry or disgruntled.

During our interview, Wortzik was wearing a county jail jumpsuit. We brought him cigarettes, but he declined them. He instead requested that we bring Mountain Dew, which is apparently a more valuable commodity than cigarettes in this Silicon Valley jail. Following is an unedited transcript of our interview with Wortzik.

The word fun has no place in your vocabulary. Stop using it. It means so many different things to so many different people that it's entirely useless. Depending on the person, it can be doing quadratic equations, running a triathlon or playing with a wet sock. It's entirely subjective.

Okay, now it's on. Wait, it's not. oh, yeah, okay, I think that light means it's on. Okay. Umm, can you start over?
I was just saying that I hate your magazine the least.

Cool. I wanted to make sure to get that on tape. Now can you tell us why you attended the ISDMA awards?
That's pretty obvious, isn't it?

Your lawyer doesn't want us to talk about the details of what happened, but can you tell us why someone might do what you've been accused of doing.
I wanted my manifesto to be heard, so I took the stage and read it out loud.

We heard it was pretty long.
There's no word count when you have a captive audience.

It was four hours before you came out.
Oh, I wasn't reading the manifesto the whole time. There was a LAN in there. I don't get much of a chance to try multiplayer gaming like that. Most people don't. Most of us have an old fashioned modem. You know what it's like to play *Counter-Strike* over a modem?

No. We have a LAN at the office and a T1 connection.
That was a rhetorical question.

Oh. So what's in your manifesto? Can you give us the condensed version?
You guys need to stop being so adolescent.

Who?
You guys. You guys who write about games. Get some verbal skills. Develop some powers of discrimination. Use a frame of reference other than *The Simpsons*. Stop being so easily impressed with mediocre games.

And that's what's in your manifesto?
Pretty much. There's also stuff about how buggy games are bad and gold editions are almost always a rip-off. I also mentioned that you shouldn't pick on John Romero so much because there are plenty of developers who've made bad games. But the important stuff is that you guys should grow up.

So what's wrong with The Simpsons anyway? Did you see the one where Homer and Bart switch bodies?
Do you know why so many computer games aren't better? The people who make them aren't held accountable for the important things, which is where you guys don't do your job.

What are the important things?
You tell me?

Me tell you?
Yeah, you tell me. You're the writer. What are the important things?

Well, I didn't exactly prepare for questions. But I would say the important things are, well, let's see, multiplayer support. Graphics. Story. You know, like in Half-Life. Umm, also fun. I guess that's the most important thing—fun.
The word fun has no place in your vocabulary. Stop using it. It means so many different things to so many different people that it's entirely useless. Depending on the person, it can be doing quadratic equations, running a triathlon or playing with a wet sock. It's entirely subjective. To some people, fun is the faithful re-creation of an F-16's avionics. To others, it's a mindless first-person shooter. To some people, fun is managing the stats of a party of characters in an RPG. To others, it's a complicated tree of tech levels in a strategy game. So stop telling me you thought something was fun and start explaining things in context by using words that actually...

Okay, there. Sorry about that. I think the other side had an interview I did with Levelord that I forgot to rewind. It just shuts off when it reaches the end of the tape, but sometimes I don't notice.
Did you get what I said about AI, violence in games, the way retail distribution strangles creativity, and how G.O.D. and Take Two have done more to hurt gaming than help it?

Yeah, I think that's all on there. I think it cut out after you were talking about those triangular Eidos boxes and those Activision strip-top cereal box flaps. So tell me, why do you hate so many games? What's your deal, man? They're not all so bad, you know.
I approach games from the perspective that there are a million games out there, but the average player only has the predilection, and more importantly the time, to play a couple of them.

Predilection? What do those go for? I just bought a brand new GeForce, too.
My job is to warn people about the bad games. You might say I'm a prophet that way. Most people only get a few games a month. I want to make sure they get the good ones. You people have to stop giving 80% to mediocre games. There's no reason stuff like *American McGee's Alice* and *Red Alert 2* should be recommended.

Do you ever build those suicide trucks in Red Alert 2? It's pretty fun. You build them and this little guy says "Watch out for the booms" and "One way treep." It's kind of racist because they have an Arab accent, but it's cool anyway.
Look at it this way. A score of 50% should mean 50% of the games out there are better than this one. A score of 90% means 10% are better. As it is, reviewers use their scores like school grades, so nothing scores below 70%. What kind of message does that send?

Changing the subject, don't you think graphics are important? What would be your pick for best graphics of 2000? Because I'm leaning towards Giants.
Did you actually play all the way through *Giants*? It got worse as it went on. All the storytelling and gameplay went by the wayside by the time it was over. It ended with a conventional boss battle. It was as if the developers knew most people wouldn't get to the end. Why wasn't this reported? Why was this covered up? Is it part of a conspiracy or is it because most reviewers didn't actually finish the game? Gamers need to be told these things.

Speaking of things gamers need to be told—how's that for a segue?—what is your pick for best game of 2000? Mine is Deus Ex.
Combat Mission.

Is that, what, a Half-Life mod?
It's a wargame.

They still make those? How about that? And you think a wargame is the best game of the year? Hey, you'll probably be able to plead insanity with opinions like that. Well, look, I've got a TRIBES 2 screenshot preview due tomorrow, so I better get going. Good luck with your trial and all that stuff. Hmm. I never was very good with things like this. It's not very intuitive and I'm not about to read a manual for a tape recorder. Maybe this button? No. I don't know. It normally just runs out on it's own.
Hit the stop button.

This one?
No. Here, give it to me.

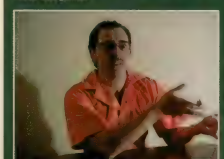
Okay.

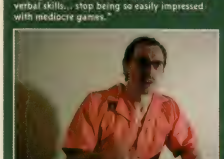
Yossarian Wortzik, thanks for taking the time to answer our questions! ■

Yossarian Wortzik awaiting arraignment.

"My job is to warn people about the bad games."

"...you shouldn't pick on John Romero so much because there are plenty of developers who've made bad games."


"You guys who write about games. Get some verbal skills... stop being so easily impressed with mediocre games."


"Is it part of a conspiracy or is it because most reviewers didn't actually finish the game? Gamers need to be told these things."

Odds and Ends

Keeping things lean for old machines

by Phil Steinmeyer

As we get nearer to completing *Tropico*, my time, and everyone's time here at PopTop, is fragmented among the dozens of tasks that go into creating, testing, and producing a finished product, and trying to make sure at least a few consumers will actually buy it. Here's a sampler of a few of these late stage odd jobs.

You've built it, can they run it?

I started the month addressing a concern I've had in the back of my mind for almost a year. *Tropico* uses an enormous amount of graphics, about 680MB worth of in-game graphics, at the moment, which is roughly 10 times as much as our last game *Railroad Tycoon II*. I want the game to run on older machines, with a spec as low as a 200MHz processor and 32MB of RAM. But I hadn't tested on a low-end machine in over a year and feared the worst.

I borrowed my wife's computer (a Compaq 233 with 32MB) from home (we don't have any machines that low-end in the office anymore). Initial tests had mixed results. The processor wasn't much of a problem—the frame rate wasn't dynamite, but it was surprisingly decent, more than adequate to play the game enjoyably. The major problem was memory. At the game's beginning, with only a small variety of game objects loaded, the game would fit in 32MB. But I had built a stress testing function, where with a single keystroke, I could force the game to instantly build every single building and every type of person (a key test, since the graphics for any given building or person aren't loaded until one of them is in the game). When I did this, memory usage soared well over 100MB, causing considerable disk-swapping and bringing the game to its knees.

Further analysis revealed that most of the memory was being used by the people and their animations. But many animations were only used in exceptional cases (riots, people dieing, etc.). I changed the game code so that those animations were only loaded on the rare occasions they were actually needed. A second waste of memory was the "fidget" animations (things people do while idle). Every unit has two or three fidget cycles (the teamster scratches his butt, the tourist takes pictures.) These fidgets were often big animations, but again, were only used sparingly in the game. I put in an option for low memory machines to only use one type of fidget per character, rather than two or three.

Finally, for each animation sequence, we had rendered an enormous number of frames to allow for ultra-smooth movement. However, on the older machines that typically only had 32MB, the processor was also slow enough that it had to skip frames in the unit animations to keep up. Voila! I could cut character memory use in half by only loading every other frame. The characters wouldn't move as smoothly, but on older machines, that was moot.

I was almost there, but needed one more low-memory option. The last area where a major savings could be made with modest visual impact was in "Zoom 0" graphics. *Tropico*'s game engine is based on a variant of the one we used for *Railroad Tycoon II*—it allows zooming in and out of the map in even increments, with an overall total of six zoom levels. When

Some of the tourists need to use Weight Watchers.

we started developing *Tropico* we used the same system, with zoom levels 1–6 (zoom 1 is the closest to the action, with the largest buildings and characters). Six months into development, we realized the characters were so much fun that we wanted to get closer to the action (*Railroad Tycoon* had no characters) so we added "Zoom 0," which is twice as close as "Zoom 1." We made the characters and buildings larger to maintain their detail at this closest zoom. Unfortunately, by doubling the width and height of each character, they now covered four times the area and used roughly four times more memory. Now, with all the buildings and characters developed, I could see that there was no way to load Zoom 0 versions of every character and building simultaneously on a 32MB machine. I put in a switch that allowed low memory machines to use the smaller Zoom 1 graphics at Zoom 1, and to use a pixel-doubled version of the Zoom 1 graphics at Zoom 0. With this switch on, all graphics are the same at Zoom 1 and higher, but are a bit blockier at Zoom 0. Since most users will typically spend most of their playing time zoomed out a couple levels, this should have only a modest impact, but it allowed us to finally and decisively get in under the 32MB mark. Including everything else (sound, game data, Direct X), the game now uses about 22MB worst case, with every building and character loaded. Of course, for machines with more memory, the switches are toggled so that the larger and more varied graphics are loaded, but now low-end computers can run the game too. I ended up playing the game on the old Compaq for two hours, and it was almost as good as playing on a high-end machine. Mission accomplished.

Artwork in the home stretch

Our artists have been very busy. We've completely finished all character animation, and are down to only three more buildings to go. Some of the most recent buildings and animations are some of the best yet. For a long time, we'd had "Archeological Dig" on our to-do list, without a clear idea of what exactly it would be. One of our artists picked up the idea of a Mayan-style pyramid, and the final result was excellent. Now, when you start a random map, somewhere on your island you've got this ruined site, and you can fix it up and open it for tourists, using it as the hub for an entire tourist enclave.

We also have a beach site and a swimming pool for the tourists. The buildings for both of these came out nice, but the animations are clincher. When you see the obese slob tourists lying out on the beach, you'll be happy it's not a nudist beach. It's okay, though; we offset those two with the requisite good lookin' bikini babe tourist. Unfortunately, she only shows up when you've built your tourist area up to an elite status—it's one more incentive for the player manage the island well.

Judging the book's cover

We also started working (belatedly) on ads and packaging for the game. We hope consumers will buy the game because of great reviews or word-of-mouth, but an attractive box never hurts. Sometimes this is handled entirely by the publisher with little developer input, but

One of the last buildings to be completed—your own little temple of the sun.

because the *Tropico* box was likely to use 3D-rendered art from within the game, we were involved the whole way.

The trickiest decision was what to emphasize. *Tropico* is first and foremost a building game, but it stands apart from other building games with its emphasis on characters, its political subgame, and its Latin/Caribbean setting. Unfortunately, it's hard to convey this wide variety of influences in a single strong ad or box cover image, without it turning into a jumbled mess that would probably turn consumers off. We had to come up with a single, strong concept that pitched one or two of the most important elements of the game, not all of them.

Some of the first concepts proposed to us played very heavily to the political side. One concept echoed the artwork of 60's communist posters. While visually interesting, we thought it overplayed a smaller part of the game (the politics), to the exclusion of game's main focus (characters and buildings). Moreover, it looked a little intimidating, and we wanted the game to come off as fun and approachable.

The second concept was to simply show a tropical island sitting in the sun. We already had some art from a cut scene in the game that depicted this. Unfortunately, the buildings and other elements in the island we had were very simple, so one of our artists, Brian, set to work on a new version, using actual 3D models from the game to create a much sharper version, suitable for the front of the box.

We also played with a variant of this idea. Among the various press coverage *Tropico* has gotten, one web site had taken two different images and combined them for a cool lead to their preview. They had composited the island image with a 200-foot tall version of *Tropico*'s "general" character (who bears a striking resemblance to Fidel Castro). I had thought the combination was really cool, but I hadn't bookmarked the site, and couldn't remember exactly who had done it. Now months later, the web

A rejected marketing direction. A bit too harsh for our tastes.

site was nowhere to be found. I asked Brian to try something similar—putting an extra large general into the scene, to add character and a more overt sense of politics and the Latin setting to the image.

I really liked the result. Brian, and some of the other artists in the office, didn't really like it. We sent it to marketing folks at a number of Take 2 offices and got mixed responses. Germany loved it. The U.S. guys were ambivalent. For a while, it looked like we'd be making two versions of the box, one with the general for Germany, one without for the U.S. However, with a little more work on cleaning up the image, and a little more time to let it sink in, we seem to have come to a rough consensus in favor of the general all-around for the packaging. If you see the box in stores with island-only and no general, you'll know we've changed our minds again. ■

Crying Uncle Over Multiplayer Battletech

We received a ton of feedback regarding the possibility of Xbox coverage in the magazine. Rather than reproduce a small sampling this month, we've decided to write a feature about consoles and PCs using many of the insightful and interesting comments from our readers. Keep those letters coming.

"Crying Uncle" with Tom

I wholeheartedly agree with Tom Chick's article, "Cry Uncle" [*CGM 123*]. Winning a videogame used to be an achievement; now it's as inevitable as seeing the ending of a movie—if you stick around long enough, it'll come. The element of skill, of playing without a net—the reason we'd all gather around an expert *Pac-Man* player in the arcade 20 years ago—is largely gone from solo gaming. And the instant-save feature in first-person-shooters leads to absurd moments such as a *Half-Life* jumping puzzle where I actually saved the game before each new jump. Imagine playing *Super Mario Brothers* that way.

It's understandable that developers would want to make the conclusion of single-player games more accessible to buyers, though. After all, once you've plunked down $50 for a game, don't you want to be able to experience the whole product without excruciating effort? As Chick notes, some kind of compromise, between the extremes of *Half-Life* (save anytime) and *Aliens Versus Predator*, (never save during long, difficult levels) might be the best way to make the single-player experience both challenging and accessible.

In the meantime, however, we need only turn to multiplayer to get smacked down like the old days. Online games from *Unreal Tournament* to *Age of Empires II* bring back that "without a net" feeling, and allow us to bask in the glory of superior players' skill (while they're kicking our butts, of course).

Gordon Cameron

Masochists, all of you! –ed

We're not for kids (though smart kids like us)

I have two children at home ages 12 and 5, and when I first saw your publication I thought that perhaps I could get some ideas for them to use on the computer for recreation and/or learning. I have been repulsed at the pictures and information that you are putting in this publication. You must not have children or you never submit this kind of material into homes that do. In my opinion, it is material like this that fuels incidents like the Columbine High School massacres.

I plan to take this magazine to my congressman and see if there is something that can be done to stop it. Also I think that it would be beneficial to my cause to get this material into the hands of parents from the Columbine High School as they would have a greater passion to see this material destroyed as would you or I, don't you think?

I would appreciate a response from you so that I could hear an explanation as to why you think this is wholesome material to sell and to put into people's homes.

Name withheld for no real reason

Unless people are rolling up copies and clobbering each other over the head, you're going to have a difficult time connecting a magazine to violent acts.

There is an (incorrect) perception from people who do not follow or understand this industry that computer gaming is for kids. While there certainly are plenty of (smart) kids out there who enjoy computer games and read this publication, we are not a children's magazine. In fact, the average age of our readers is about 30. Many have families, and much as they would do with any content that comes into their homes, they choose whether or not they feel the material in this publication is appropriate for their children. Some do, others do not. If anything, we provide a guide for parents; we describe the games, which allows them to be more informed when their kid walks in the room and says, "I want Deathbringer 2000."

But feel free to take the publication to your congressman—it'd be great publicity. –ed

3D HOT REVIEWS: TONY HAWK GOES PC!
COMPUTER GAMES
Special Report
Mech Madness!
THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF BATTLETECH ON THE PC

We forgot

It seems as though an entire series of *MechWarrior* games for the PC have slipped the mind of your writers and editors [*"Mech Madness", CGM 123*]. Unabashedly left from the history list was *Multiplayer Battletech* in it's two past (EGA and *Solaris*) and one future (*3025*) forms. *Solaris* is still being played today, though the numbers it once drew have dwindled more and more as of late). *Multiplayer Battletech: 3025*, while looking promising has been cancelled once and news about the development of the game has all but stopped. So while the future is far from solid, the series is definitely a persistent and solid community.

Mage

Many people wrote in about this omission. Guilty as charged. –ed

Chicken

Erik Wolpaw's review of The Untouchable [CGM 123] made me laugh so hard. You have great articles about popular games, and great ones about really horrible ones. Maybe you could put in a few more of the latter because they are really funny.

Anyway I like chicken and have to go pee pee, so bye.

DantheGoD

Desensitized

This letter is a response to Phil Neumann's ["*Gore is good", CGM 123*]. His letter was the perfect example of why adults need good, informative reviews like yours. An 11-year-old who is totally desensitized to violence and gore might not be what some parents want and they can act accordingly by limiting the child's exposure. Thank you for your right-on reviews. Your magazine is great!

Terry Gile

More gore

In response to Phil Neumann, the maladjusted youth from issue 123: there are two options. If he really is eleven, don't worry. As long as he can go the next few years without killing anyone in real life, he should mature and be able to handle the blood, gore, and language in games. I was the same way when I was a kid and games like *Doom* and *Mortal Kombat* started coming out. Of course, it's up to his parents to decide which games to buy for him or not.

Now, the other option is that Mr. Neumann is actually an older person who just wanted to get a message across. If this is the case, then he has succeeded. That letter was a haunting and disturbing look at the state of the world today.

Shaun O'Connor

Grow up

I think Phil Neumann seriously needs to grow up. Granted he's 11, but someone needs to set him straight. Gore and cursing does not make for a better game. I find that developers sometimes use needless blood and vulgar language as fillers for parts of games they can't find anything better to put in.

Anyone that thinks that cursing in a game is a "Stamp of Approval" is just missing out on the better parts of games. Some of the most sophisticated and adult games I've played had no gore and no cursing at all (*Myst* and *Riven* come to mind). I'm 17-years old, prime target for almost every industry in the world, yet I don't succumb to their marketing strategies.

Unfortunately, Phil is just one of the many young people in this country that do, and that feel that they are more of an adult because they can curse and play bloody video games.

Jared DiCioccio

11-year old response

The letter Phil Neumann sent, wherein he claims he speaks for all of the "kiddies," was written in a manner that inspired torrents of rage to rock my little body. At age 11, I own multiple first-person shooters, strategy games, etc.

When I play *Unreal Tournament*, I am actually occasionally mildly disturbed. Cussing in games is not horrible unless it is excessive. I do not think Phil realizes the significance and fragility of human life. While I happily play violent games, definitely having fun, I am not excited by gratuitous violence, as in *Soldier of Fortune*. I deemed that game too mature (in terms of violence) for myself and did not download the demo or consider purchasing the game.

Gore does not make a game, nor does foul language. Gameplay depth and/or great design are what make a game fun to play. That's why I come back for more.

By the way, great magazine you got there.

(I really am eleven, the vocabulary is mine.)

WCS Programmer

You're one sharp 11-year old. —ed

Stories, stories, stories!

I recently finished *The Longest Journey* after a period of four days of feverish playing, and I just wanted to say, Wow! I have never played a game with such a deep and engrossing storyline. I probably won't be able to play any other games for weeks, because, as April would say, "they're *so* not cool."

I have a fairly strong lineup of excellent games (*Half-Life*, *Unreal Tournament*, *Diablo II*, *Nox*, *Baldur's Gate*, *StarCraft*), which I hear is pretty good for a 15-year-old still living off his parent's allowance, and in my humble opinion, none of these games stand up to *The Longest Journey*.

I guess my point is that if publishers made an effort to make good backstories, and storylines for their worlds, computer games would be well on their way to beating out console superstars (not that I like consoles, I despise them), and becoming an art form—which was recently discussed in your magazine, I believe).

I don't know if anyone is going to listen to me, but if you do... I just want to say, I'm going to have some weird dreams tonight.

Sean Droms

We liked The Longest Journey as well, as evidenced by page 105. We have a lot of weird dreams too, but they're entirely unrelated to games. They usually involve dairy products and cutlery. —ed

Oops

In your review of the Pentium 4 it states that the chip ran 40%-50% faster then the Athlon test machine in *Quake III Arena*: Fastest Quality. Yet the graph shows the Athlon test system 40%-50% faster then the Pentium 4. Being a drunken college student, my brain cells may not function properly and this may all be in my head. If not, then that graph will turn a lot of people away from the Pentium 4.

Dallas Hobbs

We apologize for the error. The corrected graph can be found below. —ed

Sagging

I always enjoy reading the blurbs that are placed under the images in your game reviews; however, in proper geek fashion, I must point out an error in the review of *Zeus: Master of Olympus* [*CGM 123*]. The blurb referring to the picture of a temple with a large Zeus statue outside pokes fun at the apparently sagging roof on the temple.

According to 'Understanding Architecture' by Leland M. Roth, the Greeks would construct their temples with optical illusions that made them appear more perfect. A prime example is the world-famous Parthenon in Athens. The building appears to be an example of perfectly straight symmetry. In actuality, there are few straight lines in the building at all. The base is a curve that rises toward the center. All of the columns have a slight taper to them and slant in towards the middle of the building. The perfect symmetry of the spacing and size of the columns are an illusion as well. The end columns are two feet closer together than the other columns and were built thicker since they would be seen against open sky.

In this case, the people at Impression Games have done their homework.

Eric Polk

And people say our readers aren't, like, smart or something. They read books, man. —ed

Sacrificed

I completely agree with your 5-star *Sacrifice* review. However, you almost scared me away anyway. I'm "already cranky," and I don't need to be angered, thanks just the same. Luckily, I discovered the unrevealed truth: just pause the game. You can give all the orders you want, and then turn everyone loose again. Strategy gamers, rejoice. And buy this freakin' game!

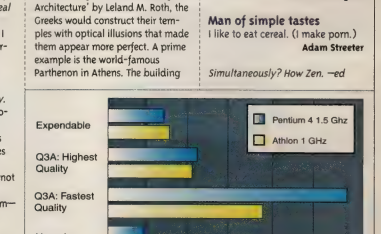
Simon Huntington

Man of simple tastes

I like to eat cereal. (I make porn.)

Adam Streeter

Simultaneously? How Zen. —ed



A 1.5 GHz Pentium 4 outpaces a 1 GHz Athlon in most games; Quake 3 is an exception.

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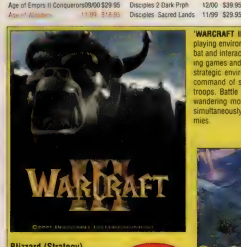

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Blizzard (Strategy)
Release: 06/01
PC CD

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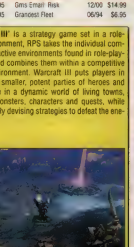

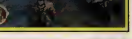

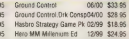

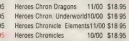

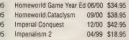

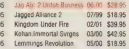

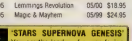

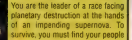

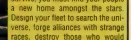

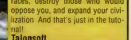

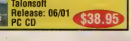

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'STARS SUPERNOVA GENESIS' You are the leader of a race facing planetary destruction at the hands of an impending supernova. To survive, you must find your people a new home amongst the stars. Design your fleet to search the universe, forge alliances with strange races, destroy those who would oppose you, and expand your civilization. And that's just in the tutorial!

Tolonsoft
Release: 06/01
PC CD

$38.95

'FALLOUT TACTICS' is a squad-based, third person tactical combat game with RPG character development and a mission-based story line, supporting both turn-based and Continuous Turn-Based play. It also features a robust multiplayer engine. Fallout Tactics takes place in the post-apocalyptic wasteland in the middle of North America. You control the main character as the leader of a squad of Brotherhood of Steel warriors.

Interplay (Strategy)
Release: 03/01
PC CD

$42.95

'STARTOPIA' Takes gamers to a once thriving galactic network of starships, space stations and planets left lifeless with redundant stars of the apocalypse. You will lead the way in rebuilding the network of space stations that once served the commerce and communication of the old empire - reuniting the surviving alien peoples under one banner.

Eidos (Strategy)
Release: 02/01
PC CD

$38.95

'COMMANDOS 2' New characters including a thief, a seductress, & a dog. More Action!!! Faster paced gameplay, but still requiring the planning & investigation of mission possibilities before execution. New vehicles include jeeps, tanks, trucks, ships, boats & cars. All of the missions in single player will be playable in a cooperative Multiplayer mode.

Eidos (Strategy)
Release: 05/01
PC CD

$38.95

'BLACK & WHITE' You play the role of a deity in a land where the surroundings are yours to shape and its people are yours to lord over. Be evil, malevolent god and the natives will worship you with fear in their eyes. Play as a kind, benevolent god and they will worship you with love in their hearts. Your actions decide whether you create a heaven or hell for your worshipers.

EA (Strategy)
Release: 03/01
PC CD

$44.95

'SPACE EMPIRES IV' Space Empires IV is a massive space strategy game for Windows. You control your empire in an ever changing and hostile galaxy. Design your starships and use them to explore new star systems throughout the galaxy. Hundreds of different components are available to place on your ships, and giant facilities to build on your planets.

Shrapnel (Strategy)
Release: NOW
PC CD

$42.95

'SUDDEN STRIKE' Is a real-time strategy and tactical simulation game. Set in WWII, with Russian, German, French, American and British missions focusing on tactical fighting. Up to 1,000 units per scenario, giant maps, realistic simulations complete with "real" explosions. Units gain experience and make it from one mission to the next. Multi-player mode: up to 12 players and 4 teams.

Strategic (Strategy)
Release: NOW
PC CD

$38.95

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CSM 0401 Pg5

'POOL OF RADIANCE' A new Pool of Radiance has been discovered in the ruined city of Myth Drannor. Featuring the new 3rd Edition D&D Rules, 3D character and monster models, interactive environments, action-based combat system, multiplay and singleplay dungeons, over 100 spells, and other new D&D items. Based on the first AD&D computer RPG, Ruins of Myth Drannor continues the heroic quest against unfathomable evil and is the latest game in the Gold Box series from SSI.

$39.95

SSI (Roleplaying)
Release: 04/01
PC CD

'ICEWIND DALE: HEART OF WINTER' Continue the adventure in the Ten Towns with Icewind Dale: Heart of Winter, the expansion pack for Icewind Dale. Icewind Dale: Heart of Winter uses Advanced D & D rules and is set in the Forgotten Realms universe. With additions that both increase playability, like the higher experience cap, and add the technical enhancements made by consumers such as 800x600 screen resolution

Interplay (Roleplaying)
Release: 02/01
PC CD

$28.95

'ARCANUM' Witness firsthand the throes of Arcanum's conflict between its magical past and its industrial future. Customize your character, with 8 basic stats, over a dozen derived stats, 16 primary skills, 80 spells, and 56 technological degrees within 3 disciplines. Play in real-time, or use the turn-based system of combat. Play online cooperatively or competitively over the Internet or LAN.

Sierra (Roleplaying)
Release: 05/01
PC CD

$42.95

'ANACHRONOX' Is a 3D RPG from Ion Storm that uses the Quake II engine in a third-person, single player game with real-time combat. Control up to three characters as they trek across the galaxy and three different spaceships to save Starfleet Command. Search through more than 100 levels and fight over 150 monsters in your quest to find the truth.

Eidos (Roleplaying)
Release: 03/01
PC CD

$38.95

'ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND' Finds series hero, perennial pirate-wannabe Guybrush Threepwood, returning to face sociopathic pirate, freakishly deformed buccaneers, and an insult flinging original villain with a sinister agenda. Hoist the yardarms, batten down the hatches, and let the insults fly!

Lucas Arts (Adventure)
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'TRIPLE PLAY BASEBALL' Compete in the home run tournament with 3 different modes. Pit todays superstars against baseballs legendary players like Hank Aaron, Mickey Mantle, Babe Ruth, Ted Williams and more. Unlock special cheats and rewards and even play head to head with your face on a created player via the internet.You can play ranked or unranked play in a single game or in the Big League.

EA (Sports)
Release: 03/01
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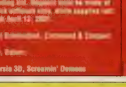

Mindscape (Roleplaying)
Release: 09/01
PC CD

$48.95

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'LONGEST JOURNEY' The Longest Journey is an epic adventure through the twin worlds of Stark and Arcadia, seen through the eyes of April, an 18-year old art student. The Longest Journey features more than 100 unique locations, a cast of more than 50 characters, and huge variety of story-related puzzles.

FunCom (Adventure)
Release: NOW
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'RUSSO-GERMAN WAR 41-44' is an operational level wargame that covers combat between Germany and Russia from June 22, 1941 to October 29,1944. The Russo-German War map covers Poland to the Urals and Southern Finland to the Caucasus. There are 860 village, towns and cities on the map.

Schwerpunkt (War) Release: NOW PC CD

$39.95

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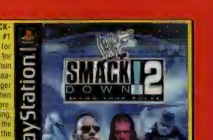
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Tiger Woods 2001	11/00	$39.95
Tomb Raider 5	11/00	$39.95
Tomba 2 The Brats Revenge Pc Stat+ 2	09/00	$19.95
Tomeko The Last Hope	12/00	$39.95
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X Men 3D Mutant Acad	05/00	$39.95

DREAMCAST

Title	Release	Price
4x4 Evolution	11/00	$38.95
Army Men Sarge's Heroes 1	12/00	$44.95
Bang! Gunship Elite	08/00	$38.95
Capcom Pc Stick	12/00	$39.95
Coaster Works	01/01	$35.95
Dave Mirra Free BMX	12/00	$42.95
Deadly Arena USA 2001	03/01	$46.95
Ducati World Racing	02/01	$42.95
Evolution 2	11/00	$38.95
Godzilla	01/01	$48.95
Grandia 2	01/01	$48.95
Hdf Life Online	03/01	$46.95
Heroes Might Magic III	03/01	$44.95
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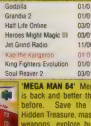
Kao the Kangaroo	01/01	$48.95
King Fighters Evolution	01/01	$44.95
Soul Reaver 2	03/01	$48.95



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Capcom (Adventure) Release: NOW N64
$54.95

Title	Release	Price
ECW Anarchy Rulez	12/00	$39.95
Ecco the Dolphin	12/00	$38.95
Evil Dead Hail King	01/01	$44.95
Felony Pursuit	01/01	$46.95
Ferrari 355	09/00	$46.95
Looney Tunes Space Race	03/01	$38.95
MTV Sports Skateboard	10/00	$44.95
Mat Hoffmans Pro BMX	02/01	$44.95
Metropolis	01/01	$46.95

PLAYSTATION 2

Title	Release	Price
Armored Core 2	10/00	$46.95
Army Men Air Attack 2	02/01	$49.95
Dead or Alive 2: Hardcore	10/00	$49.95
Dynasty Warriors 2	10/00	$49.95
Eternal Ring	10/00	$49.95
Everquest	10/00	$49.95
FIFA Soccer 2001	11/00	$46.95
Gradius 3 & 4	11/00	$46.95
GunGriffon Blaze	11/00	$46.95
Kengo Master of Bushido	01/01	$49.95
Kessen	10/00	$49.95
Knockout Kings 2001	02/01	$48.95
Legacy Kain Soul Rvr 2	03/01	$49.95
Madden FB 2001	10/00	$49.95
NASCAR 2001	12/00	$49.95
NBA Hoopz	02/01	$49.95
NFL Game Day 2001	11/00	$48.95
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Time Splitters	10/00	$49.95
Warriors Might & Magic	12/00	$48.95

NINTENDO 64

Title	Release	Price
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Mario Tennis	09/00	$49.95
Mega Man 64	01/01	$59.95
Mickeys Speedway USA	11/00	$52.95
Ogre Battle 64	10/00	$56.95
Paper Mario Story	02/01	$49.95
Perfect Dark	05/00	$52.95
Pokemon Puzzle League	09/00	$49.95
Tony Hawks Pro Skater	03/00	$46.95
WWF No Mercy	11/00	$39.95

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Title	Release	Price
Donkey Kong Country 2	11/00	$28.95
Dragon Warrior 1 & 2	09/00	$28.95
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Legend River King 2	03/01	$32.95
Legend Zelda Link Awake	01/99	$28.95
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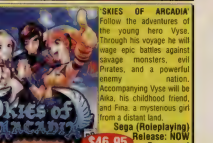
WorkingDesigns (Roleplaying) Release: NOW PSX



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Sega (Roleplaying) Release: NOW Dreamcast

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Nintendo (Roleplaying) Release: NOW N64
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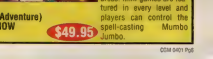

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Nintendo (Adventure) Release: NOW N64
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Next month we'll take a look at the past, present and future of massively multiplayer online games. We look back at classics from the early days of online services, such as the Kesmai games and Neverwinter Nights from Compuserve and AOL respectively. We'll also look at the current money pits like EverQuest and Ultima Online. And finally, we're scouring the world looking for as many of the upcoming ones as we can find. There's a lot of them. A whole lot. So many, in fact that we're virtually guaranteed to miss a few. So get those e-mails ready and check out this feature.

PLUS:

Age of Empires designer Rick Goodman takes on a bigger slice of history with Empire Earth. It's 3D, it's real-time, it has cavemen versus tanks versus giant mechanoid units, it has... pretty much every real-time strategy feature known to man.

Irrational Games, creator of our 1999 Game of the Year *System Shock 2*, takes on the curse of the superhero game with *Freedom Force*. It's 3D, it's real-time, it has buildings you can blow up, it has... a superhero named Minute Man. Sounds like a prostate problem.

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